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HOOKS OF STEEL

HOOKS OF STEEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"A LADY OF MY OWN," "HER HEART'S DESIRE," &c.

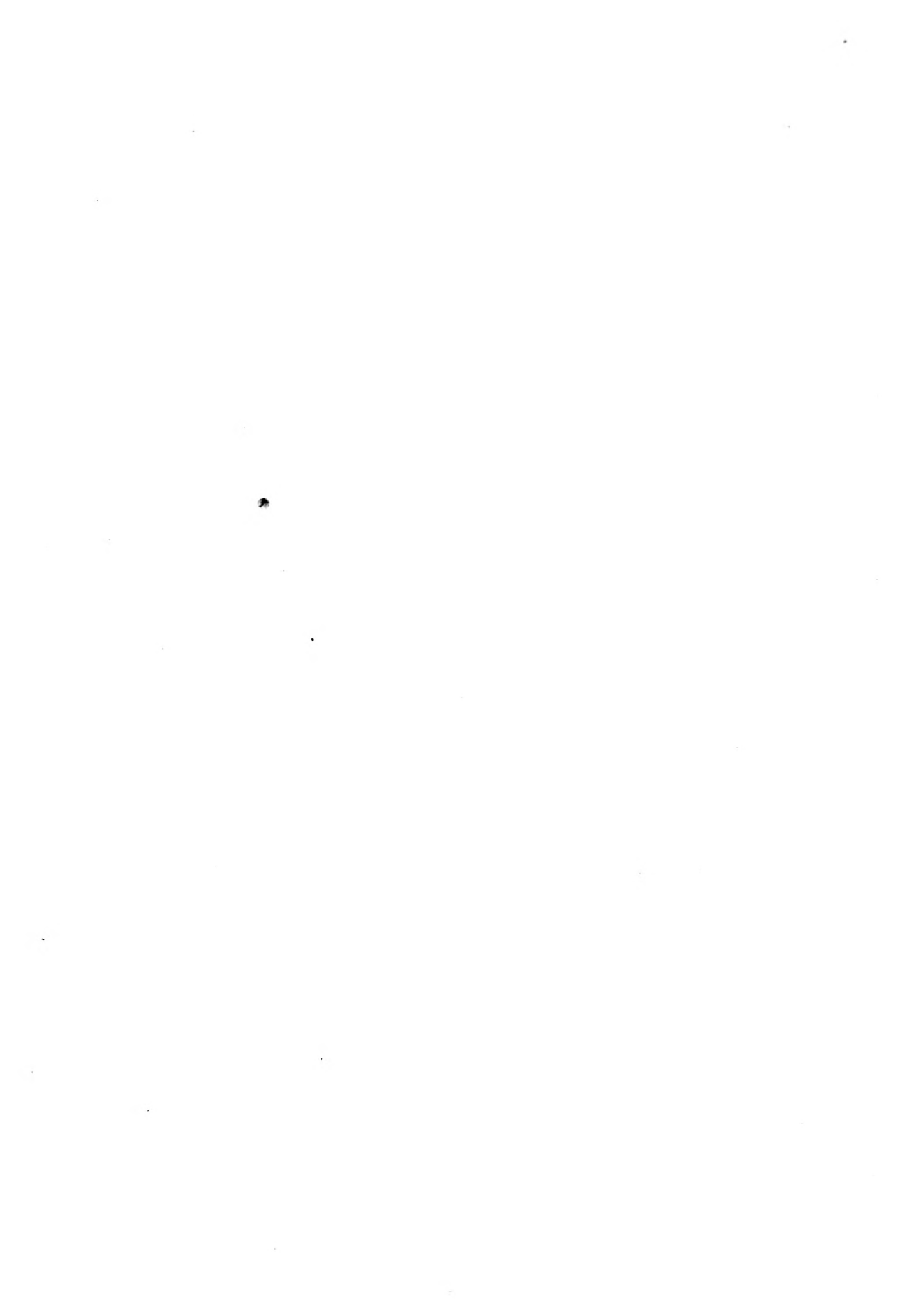
"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with Hooks of Steel."
—SHAKSPERE.

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II

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HOOKS OF STEEL.

Book II.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE followed a very anxious interval after the posting of this letter. Matthew tried to appear very calm and cool, and talked a great deal about the necessity for patience, and the constant delays in postal arrangements, and the possibilities of people being out when letters arrived, and consequently remaining unaware of the necessity for instant action; but I saw through him and knew he was as anxious as I was. We watched a good deal from the windows the first day, but towards evening I lost hope, and Matthew in vain tried to beguile me into cheerfulness.

Next morning we went as usual for our

daily prowl. We passed the invalid lady in her bath-chair, and she smiled at me, and half stopped her donkey as though inclined to speak, which made my uncle very angry. He said an exchange of bottles of port and thanks did not constitute an acquaintance, and if the lady forgot herself again he should tell her so. After this we prowled about for nearly an hour without meeting anyone. Not even a tabby appeared to vary the monotony of our proceedings. I was feeling very dull and depressed when suddenly my uncle struck the ground with his stick and exclaimed:

“We’ve never shown the Valkyrie Cæsar’s camp!”

His ideas were always put into execution immediately; no sooner had he spoken than off he went, as hard as he could tear, to show me the camp. I followed, pleased at the idea of seeing a memorial of the mighty Cæsar, and Matthew pantingly tried to keep pace with his master.

“Be indignant, be very indignant, Madam,” he whispered as he passed me.

A ten minutes’ scamper brought us to some untidy looking ground.

“Behold the camp!” cried my uncle, halting suddenly with an air of fierce anger. I looked about me for—

“—the ruins of the noblest man
That ever lived in the tide of times.”

Nothing in the least impressive met my eye; I did not even understand where common ended and camp began. Could my uncle mean a little mound to the left? It was not my idea of a camp, but then—I reflected—the ancient Britons in the year 56 were a very simple people, and doubtless easily impressed, and of course Julius Cæsar knew this, and perhaps felt it would be waste of time to make a grand fortification. Besides, a man who could bestride the narrow world like

a Colossus had no need of fortifications, a mound might have been enough for him. But what was there to be indignant about? I could not conceive, and stood silent, afraid to make any remark.

“Well, what do you think of it?” asked my uncle, turning sharply upon me.

“I am most indignant,” I answered, looking helplessly at Matthew.

“Shameful!” exclaimed Matthew, giving me a quiet nudge, which I interpreted to mean—“Go on in this style.”

“Abominable! Iniquitous! Disgraceful!” I continued more boldly, and then followed a dramatic pause.

“One of England’s oldest monuments!” was my uncle’s next remark, spoken in a low, hissing tone, as if he were still very angry.

I felt it was incumbent upon me to make some reply to this, and looked vaguely around in the hope of seeing something unmistakably monu-

mental, which would serve as a peg upon which to hang an observation. Nowhere was there anything in the slightest degree monumental. I looked again at Matthew. He was grimacing violently, but his grimaces conveyed nothing to me. At last I said in despair:

“Indeed! how well it has lasted!”

My uncle turned crimson, and I saw instantly I had made a mistake.

“What does she mean? What on earth does the Valkyrie mean?” he cried, turning fiercely to Matthew.

“She means, considering its barbarous treatment,” answered Matthew hurriedly.

“Yes, of course I meant considering its barbarous treatment,” I repeated nervously.

“Oh! I see! I see! Beg pardon for not understanding you, my dear. You are right; it is a marvel any trace of the camp has remained at all. It was once a magnificent memorial, a relic

of olden times which the nation should have esteemed even more highly than Stonehenge itself. And mind, it belonged to me; as part of the common it belonged to me."

"Of course," I assented.

"Most certainly," observed Matthew.

"But an impostor springs up, says it is no part of the common, claims it as his own, and proceeds to destroy it. Fills up the ditch, pulls down the double rampart, in fact, as you see, *obliterates* the camp! He even cut down the matchless ring of oaks which encircled it. Could barbarism go further?"

"Shameful," I murmured, beginning to feel very weary of the camp.

"And the nation calmly sat down and smiled."

"Abominable," said Matthew mechanically.

"And what do you think was Parliament's action in the matter?"

"Made it over to a body of conservators," I

suggested tremulously, remembering what Parliament had been guilty of before.

“Ha! Ha! A good joke!” laughed my uncle in his loud peculiar way. “I didn’t think you were so clever. It didn’t do that, but it did something quite as idiotic. It waited until the camp was destroyed, and then declared it an Ancient Monument. Now, what d’you think of Parliament?”

“I don’t think much of it,” I observed.

“I never did,” said Matthew.

“No more does anyone else,” said my uncle. “Fine legislation! A set of gabbling old women in trousers—— Hi, there! get off my camp! get off the ancient monument. How dare you trespass on ground that’s been declared an ancient monument, Sir?”

I looked up, startled at this sudden change of address. Before us, on the mound I had before noticed, stood a young man, his figure clearly

defined against the background of bright sky. His head was uncovered, the sun glittered on his chestnut curls, his attitude, that of one suddenly arrested in motion, was indescribably graceful.

“The herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill.”

The passage had just time to flash through my bewildered brain, then I gave a wild cry of recognition and rushed towards the arrested figure. Not Mercury! but someone far more beautiful to me, my own longed-for Felix! When I reached him I could scarcely speak for joy; I could only cling to him with sobbing breaths, burying my face upon his shoulder. Here was my dearest friend at last, someone perfectly sane, someone whose actions could be absolutely depended upon, someone who would not regard me as a Valkyrie, but as what I was, Rosamund,

a human being, full of faults and foolishnesses, but to be loved for all that.

“Dear one, sweet one, you make me feel inclined to cry,” said Felix, putting his arms tenderly round me, and by the tone of his voice I knew he had been longing for me just as I had been longing for him. Then he put his hand under my chin and lifted my face to his, looking earnestly into it, as if he sought to read there the whole history of the weeks of separation. I gazed absorbedly back at him, feeling as if I had never before fully realized the beauty of his face. How full of life and expression his features, how tenderly-speaking his golden brown eyes! What a change from the terrible bland smile which had pursued me of late even in my dreams! I had passed from darkness into light, the clear light of reason, glorified by love. Here was a mind whose workings could be understood, here was a heart that beat answeringly; the mind

could be read in the face, the heart could be heard in the voice, no incomprehensible anger, or demoniac laughter was to be feared here, in Felix's arms. For quite a space of time we stood thus, silently gazing into each other's eyes; then Felix gently smoothed the hair back from my forehead and spoke again.

"That's right," he said, "your face wears its natural look now. Do you know, little one, it gave me quite a shock to see you when you ran up to me, you had such a pale, scared look. You were like a poor little frightened lamb."

"Running to its shepherd, running to its loved shepherd," I said, clinging closely to him in an abandonment of delight and safety.

Felix smiled lovingly. "I did right to come," he murmured, as though to himself.

"Was it my letter brought you?" I asked.

"Yes, the extravagant, impatient little letter, which breathed so of the writer in every line,

Felix could no longer stay away from her."

"Felix stayed away weeks. He was cruel. He never sent a single line, and he made Rosamund, oh! so miserable."

"My dearest, don't blame me: I will explain why I did not write, but not now; we will not talk of painful things just at the moment of meeting."

"How did you manage to find me here?"

"I went to your house first, and heard you were roaming on the common, so came in search of you, and an old lady in a bath-chair told me you had come this way."

"Oh, I know, the '47 port old lady. Did you ask her about me?"

I asked if she had seen you pass. She knew who I meant directly I mentioned golden hair. But, dearest, was that your uncle who called to me? See! That gentleman, apparently doubled up with laughter?" I looked back at my uncle.

Something had undoubtedly awakened his mirth, he was literally doubled up with it.

“Yes,” I replied, “that is my uncle. He does laugh a good deal sometimes.” I spoke constrainedly, feeling it would be difficult to satisfactorily explain my uncle, unless I at once declared him mad, and this—though I could scarce tell why—I shrank from doing.

Felix looked at me in slight surprise, and put on his hat. “I think I ought to go and he presented to him,” he said, “it would be polite.”

Rather reluctantly I led him back to the gentlemen.

“Ha! Ha!” roared my uncle, rocking himself to and fro in an ecstasy of mirth as we approached, “I know all about it. Oh, the naughty Valkyrie! Oh, the sly Valkyrie! saying nothing about her lover, and then bringing him out suddenly on the top of an ancient monument.”

Felix gazed at him astounded, and then looked

from him to Matthew who was standing a little in the background. Matthew lifted his hand and tapped his forehead with it quickly but very significantly, an action that seemed familiar to me, though at the time I could not remember why. I have never seen anyone look so shocked as Felix did then. He staggered back a pace, as if he had received a blow, and the stick he was carrying fell from his hand.

Matthew sprang forward and returned it to him. "Humour him, humour him, for the dear young Madam's sake," I heard him say in a quick whisper.

It was some time before my uncle could cease laughing, he had been so tickled by my bringing my lover suddenly out on the top of an ancient monument. He managed at last to straighten himself and address Felix.

"Sir," he said, "my man tells me you are descended in a straight line from Balder, the son

of Woden. How strange and delightful if it should be so. It would make you a most fitting mate for the Valkyrie who could not of course choose a husband from the vulgar herd. Tell me, is it so?"

"Quite so," answered Felix, with admirable tact and calmness; but then he would have said "quite so" to anything for my sake, as Matthew had already divined.

"Then we are relations," continued my uncle. "I might have known it. Now I look at you I see you have the same look of long descent the Valkyrie has. Pray use my common whenever you come this way, as a relation I cannot but grant you the privilege. Will you honour my castle by a visit? I shall be most pleased to give you luncheon if you can spare us the time. A cold plain luncheon you must understand, only the remains of yesterday's dinner. We have to study economy in our household. I will explain why at luncheon."

Felix at once accepted the invitation, and declared there was nothing he liked better than a cold plain luncheon.

“Ha! well! That’s all settled!” cried my uncle in high good humour. “We’ll go home at once. Now, Matthew, don’t hang back like that, my relation doesn’t want *your* conversation, he wasn’t sprung upon me, so to speak, from the top of an ancient monument in order to be allowed to enjoy *your* conversation. Come on ahead with me, and let the young people walk together. You’ve no tact, Matthew, you’ve no tact.”

Matthew had been trying to give Felix a few useful hints as to deportment in the castle, but finding his good intentions thus frustrated, he joined my uncle, and with great tact the two walked ahead together studiously avoiding the smallest glance to the rear.

Felix took my hand, and by the convulsive way in which he clasped it I knew he was

greatly disturbed. I thought I would continue the lesson Matthew had begun.

“You have nothing to fear, Felix dear,” I said. “Humour him on the subject of the common and you’ll find him a lamb, a perfect lamb. Don’t praise the Wildacre Common Act before him, it drives him wild, but you can praise the old Statute of Merton as much as you like. Mind, be very indignant about ancient monuments. And remember he’s very poor, mind you agree with him about that, or he’ll be fearfully angry. But there is nothing to fear, and if you can accommodate yourself to circumstances, drink your tea out of the spout and that sort of thing, it really is a very pleasant home—at least, so Matthew says, but I don’t know, Felix—it’s a little bit—lonely—and—not very nice—rather wearying and frightening——”

I broke off here, still feeling a little upset, and looked up at Felix. Then I received quite a

shock ; his eyes were brimming over with tears.

"Oh, Felix!" I exclaimed, "You are crying!"

"It's the misery of my position," he said, dashing the tears off hastily with his hand. "To see an imaginative, highly strung, delicate young thing like you sharing the home of a lunatic, and to be unable to take you away from it. And God alone knows when I shall be able to."

"Is it for me you are crying, Felix dear?" I said, pressing closer to him. "Don't cry for me. I don't mind sharing the home of a lunatic, at least not much, not much if you come constantly to see me. I must say I have pined for you. You see, I am not allowed to associate with anybody, and I do so long for the companionship of someone young. It is the want of companionship which will be my greatest trial here. Matthew is very kind, but he is a little old for me. But except for that, I have quite accommodated myself to circumstances. After all, per-

haps my uncle is not madder than anyone else. As Matthew says, it is very difficult to distinguish the sane from the insane. I don't think there is any marked line between the two. It is quite easy to go over the border. I often imagine myself mad like my uncle, and then I reason as a madman would reason and feel there is real reason in my reasoning. So if as a madman I feel sane, why should not you who feel sane be a madman? Why should not the whole world be insane without knowing it? Am I sane? Are you sane? Is anyone ever really sane? Are——"

Felix interrupted me almost sharply. "Rosa-mund!" he exclaimed, "for heaven's sake don't muddle your childish brains over such senseless questions. Your uncle may be perfectly harmless—I shall find out about that before I leave—but he's as mad as a hatter. Take my word for it. And you and I are perfectly sane, and I beg you'll rest content with that fact."

I was willing to rest content with any fact now I had Felix by my side, and dismissed the subject of madness from my mind, little thinking that there would come an awful period in my life when I should be perilously near going "over the border" like my poor uncle.

We had a most pleasant luncheon. Now my dearest friend had come, my uncle's peculiarities became a matter of no importance. The air of Paradise did fan the house, and angels officed all. Felix's tact was wonderful. Of course he had to listen to the whole story of my uncle's wrongs, but never once did he do or say a wrong thing, and I could see that both my uncle and Matthew were immensely taken with him. Matthew had placed my seat at the head of the table, opposite my uncle's, and for the first time I realized the pleasure of being mistress of an establishment. There was cold chicken before me, which Felix chose but, not quite knowing

how to carve it, I advised him to take cold mutton, and so saved my dignity.

When luncheon was over my uncle as usual retired to Valhalla, Matthew discreetly withdrew, and Felix and I were left to our own devices. I decided to take him out, and show him the fairy glades I had discovered the first morning at the castle. But somehow those sweet arcades could not be found. Fate had ordained that Felix and I were to meet there under very different circumstances.

"How disappointing!" I exclaimed, coming to a standstill in the midst of a maze of furze bushes. "We might have had such ideal moments there. Ah, well! It is of no use tiring ourselves further, though I am sure we tried the right wood last time. Let us sit here upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings."

"Yes," said Felix, throwing himself down on the turf by my side, "it does not do to go in

quest of ideal moments. They come unsought or they come not at all. But if you don't mind, Rosamund, I'll excuse you the sad stories about the kings. Let us talk of matters nearer home."

"Very well," I answered readily, "let us talk about Exbourne. Tell me, are you still studied in a sad ostent to please your grandam?"

Felix raised himself into a sitting attitude, and pulled his hat so low down over his eyes that I could hardly see his face.

"My grandmother and I have quarrelled and parted," he answered, after a moment's pause.

"Oh, fancy!" I exclaimed, secretly much pleased by this intelligence.—"What did you quarrel about, Felix?"

"You," he answered rather reluctantly.

A thrill of delight went through me. This was most dramatic! It was like the beginning of a play, and I—I, was the heroine.

"A quarrel about me! Oh, what did she say?"

Did she forbid you to come to me? Did she forbid you to write? Was that the reason of your silence?" I exclaimed breathlessly.

"She told me," answered Felix slowly, "that I must choose between her and you, and she gave me a month to think about it, begging me not to write to you in the interval."

"And you?"

"I am here," answered Felix very quietly.

"You chose me, you chose me!" I cried in a transport of joy. "Oh, Felix, you have made me so happy. I don't wish to say anything rude about your grandmother, but I really could not bear her; I thought her a most disagreeable woman. Oh! There is something I wished particularly to ask you. Miss Skinner said you were to marry that girl who played your accompaniment, your cousin, the heiress to Cwmcoch Hall. Felix, you never would, you surely never would marry her?"

"Certainly not," answered Felix, pushing back

his hat, and suddenly gazing full into my eyes.

“Of course you will”—I was on the point of going on to say, “Of course you will marry me;” but that sudden intent gaze of Felix’s disconcerted me strangely. I pulled myself up hastily in the middle of the sentence, and blushed furiously, suddenly conscious that this was a thing a girl ought not to say.

“Of course I will what?” asked Felix, still gazing at me, a curious delighted smile playing round his lips.

I made no answer. Felix did not press me further, but kindly averted his eyes from my burning face.

“Dear sweet Rosamund,” he said, taking my hand and pressing it fondly; “I hardly know how much or how little to tell you, whether to treat you as child or woman. Sometimes you seem all child, at others—yes, I think I ought to tell you clearly all that has happened, so that you may understand the position.”

CHAPTER V.

THEN speaking very quietly and slowly Felix told me the story of the last month. Mrs. Vaughan-Price had been greatly incensed by my behaviour at her "at home." Felix did not disguise that fact. She had taken a great dislike to me. That evening she told her grandson it was the dream of her life that he should marry his cousin Angharad, and live at Cwmcoch Hall, her own old home. She promised if he did this to settle a handsome income upon him, and to leave him everything of which she was possessed. Felix decidedly and at once refused to marry his cousin. His grandmother then asked him if he had an affection

for me. Felix replied that he had. Whereupon she flew into a terrible rage, and forbade him to hold any communication with me whatsoever. Felix refused to give me up. His grandmother then told him that if he did not consent to give me up, she would wash her hands of him for ever: he should go his own way, and fight his own battle with life unhelped by her. Felix again refused to give me up. His grandmother gave him a month to think of it, and made him accompany her to Berry Point next day, so as to prevent his having another interview with me. She also begged him not to hold any correspondence with me during the month, and Felix, wishing to propitiate her, and hoping she might relent, yielded to her on this point. Towards the end of the month Miss Skinner delivered my letter, which seemed to have precipitated matters, but Felix said if he had waited the full month his decision would have been just the same.

After reading it he went to his grandmother, told her that I was very miserable and lonely, and that it was his intention to pay me a visit.

“If you do,” said Mrs. Vaughan-Price, “you will not return to this house. Choose now between her and me.”

Here Felix stopped suddenly, as if unable to proceed with his story.

“Yes?” I said, bending towards him eagerly.

“I made my choice,” he said, turning his face away from me and speaking with a quietness that was almost strange. “My luggage lies waiting for me at Victoria station, and I am here. I have said good-bye to my home.”

I raised his hand and pressed it softly to my cheek, rejoiced at the thought that he should have chosen me in preference to his grandmother and the heiress to Cwmcoch Hall. So quietly and calmly had Felix told the story, so manfully had he suppressed all show of feeling, I failed entirely

to realize the immensity of the sacrifice he had made for me. Oh, how I scorn myself now when I think of that moment ! Many a time since have I seen Felix in my dreams, sitting by my side amongst the gorse bushes, and saying quietly : “I have said good-bye to my home.” Saying it very quietly with his face turned away, so that I might not find out he was suffering. A child might have understood the full sad meaning of his words, even a child knows that a plant suffers when torn violently from the old soil. For my sake Felix had given up fortune and kindred and home. For my sake had torn himself away from all the luxuries and pleasantnesses of life, to enter, unaided and alone, the poor man’s arena, where the struggle for existence is so fierce that the strongest sometimes fall, never to rise again. Yet I failed to comprehend ; it did not even occur to me that he might have, must have suffered, or that home and grandmother,

and the old life with its many associations, were in all probability dear to him. Years afterwards it was all borne in fully upon me, and, too late, my heart learned to ache for Felix.

“Well, Felix,” I said jubilantly, “I don’t think that horrid old grandmother is much loss. We shall both be much happier I am sure, now we are rid of her.”

Yes, those were my very words: no hint in them of the slightest recognition of his unselfish devotion. Felix turned and looked at me, a hurt disappointed expression in his eyes.

“Don’t, Rosamund,” he said, “don’t speak in that way. It sounds unfeeling. You don’t know how it distressed me to vex the old lady. She brought me up, she had centred all her hopes in me, she is almost my only living relation.”

“Why doesn’t the cross old thing behave more kindly then?” I said obstinately.

"I am defying her, setting at naught her strongest wishes."

"Never mind: you had to choose between her and me, and you have chosen Rosamund. Won't you be happy—with Rosamund?"

"Dearest one, you don't seem to realize the position. I was absolutely dependent upon my grandmother. I am a poor man now. I am almost penniless. All I have in the world consists of a handful of gold, and a portmanteau or two now waiting for me at the station. For a long time it will be a struggle to earn my daily bread. It will be years before I can be happy—with Rosamund; before I can give her a comfortable home. That is where lies the bitterest pain of all. In my grandmother's hand lay all good gifts, she could have given me you, Rosamund, and made us both happy."

I was silent for a moment or two. The situ-

ation was beginning to dawn upon me, and it did not strike me as a cheerful one.

"I can't think why you wanted to go and tell your grandmother all about it," I said pettishly, "you might have visited me without letting her know anything about it. It's a miserable look-out for us both now."

Felix looked at me with quite a startled expression. "Surely, Rosamund, you would not have liked me to enter upon such a mean course of deception," he said.

His words stung me, as a sharp rebuke would have done. I had scarcely realized the course would be mean, though I saw it the instant he had spoken. So disturbed and low did I feel I scarcely knew what I was saying.

"Let us go home and have tea," I said, jumping to my feet and tossing back my hair impatiently, "it is not at all ideal here."

A hurt look came again upon Felix's face

and he was unusually silent as we walked home. We were both very quiet at tea time, Felix scarcely spoke at all, and seemed both melancholy and abstracted. I watched him, half yearning to comfort him, yet too dispirited myself to make the effort. When tea was over we hung about the room, examining the books, and carrying on a constrained, intermittent kind of conversation, very different to our old free intercourse. I stole furtive looks at Felix from time to time. A new expression seemed to me to have stolen into his face. He wore the look of a man who had received a shock, and been disappointed. I had disappointed him; I felt it. He had come here feeling sure of his Rosamund's love and sympathy, and he had failed to get it. I now longed to go up to him and tell him I loved him, and would wait for him for ever. But a dead weight seemed to have fallen upon me, mingled with a hitherto unknown feel-

ing of shyness. I could not begin; he must begin; tender words must come first from him.

The moments stole steadily by, and the red glow of the sunset began to fill the room. Through the large window which faced westwards I could see the sun sinking like a blood-red disc behind the darkly wooded hills. The common lay between us and the setting sun, a silent, level land, bathed in the same red light which filled the room, but touched into ghostliness by long dark shadows which crept onwards like living things. The advance guards of night, which lay crouching behind the hills, not my familiar friends the cloud shadows; they exhilarated, these only depressed me.

"I see you have no piano here," remarked Felix, breaking a silence which had fallen between us.

"No," I answered constrainedly, "I wish there were. Music would be something in this waste land."

Again a silence.

“Do you ever hear from any of your school-fellows?” asked Felix, breaking it once more, just as it was getting almost too oppressive to bear.

“I have never heard but once,” I answered, still constrainedly. “Isabel and Joanna, the two I liked best, left, as you know, six months before I did, and are now teaching in schools themselves; and Isabel in answer to a letter I wrote her told me she was so overworked she could not keep up a correspondence with me, so I have never written again. That was the one letter I have had since I came to this house.”

“You are very friendless, Rosamund.”

“Very,” I answered, with a slight break in my voice.

Felix made an impulsive step towards me. Overcome by a nervous feeling I could not analyze, I turned sharply from him, and looked

out of the window. The action checked his impulsive advance. He stopped, then I heard him heave a heavy sigh and pull out his watch.

"I must go," he said. "It will not do for me to get up to town too late. I have to pick up my luggage, and find a room somewhere."

He said this very sadly, and for the first time I fully realized that Felix was now homeless. It gave me a shock to think of him wandering off by himself in the evening, not knowing where he should lay himself down to sleep."

"You must stay here," I said, turning to him excitedly.

"No," said Felix firmly. "I will not do that. I must begin at once to be independent and make myself a home."

"If you would let me ask Matthew I am sure he would manage to spare you some money, and then you could go to an hotel——"

"I could not dream of such a thing."

“But what will you do when your handful of money is gone?”

“I have hands, I have brains, I have a voice; do not distress yourself. I have no fears for myself. My fears are all for you. It seems to me that—you seem to me so unfitted to bear—any trial. I feel so terribly that I can do nothing for you in the present beyond giving you my love. And this afternoon it has struck me for the first time that perhaps I am not justified in seeking to link your life to my life, which has so unexpectedly changed to a life of struggle. You are so young, so inexperienced, another might come forward whom you might prefer, and who would be able to give you at once the ease and comfort which seem so very far off from me. I feel there is only one thing which could justify me in asking you to bind yourself to me, and that is the assurance from your own lips that your love for me is so deep it could not change,

however trying might be the years of waiting that would have to follow. The assurance it could not change; that you would never repent giving yourself to me, Rosamund."

He looked at me wistfully. I stood before him absolutely silent, confused by a whirl of varying emotions. The red glow was fading from the room, and the shadows seemed to have stolen in upon us.

"I see,——" he said, looking very white now the red glow no longer shone on his face. "You feel you cannot give me that assurance. No word from me shall press you. I will go now, Rosamund, I will not press you. But I thought, when I got that letter—that love—that love——"

His voice was breaking now. He turned and strode out of the room, and as he turned I saw his eyes were glittering with tears, and I knew his heart was overflowing with the bitterest disappointment a man can feel.

All shyness, every vestige of doubt as to the state of my own feelings left me. Like a whirlwind I rushed to the doorway after him.

“Felix! Felix!” I cried, “are you leaving me like this? Oh! don’t leave me like this.”

He turned and came back instantly into the now dusky room, and I fell sobbing into his arms.

“You thought right when you got that letter,” I sobbed—“when you thought that love—that love——” like him I could get no further.

“That love—yes, darling, go on,” whispered Felix tenderly in my ear.

I struggled to say it bravely. “That love, for you, is so deep in my heart, so deep in my heart, Felix, it can never change; no, never change, whatever happens, however long the years of waiting may be. Never change, whether you are able to give me a comfortable home or not. Never change, even if you died. Do not leave me, Felix; I am so friendless, as you say, my

poor father is dead now, and my uncle is mad. Whom have I but you? I could not do without you. I have had you ever since I was a little girl, you are my dearest friend. No other could ever be what you are to me, no words can tell how I love you."

Then there was a long silence in the dusky room, not the silence of constraint any longer, but the silence of love. I had given Felix all he wanted, there was no shadow between us now. Though I could not see his face, I knew he was happy. Clasped tightly in his arms, with my head on his shoulder, I knew I was all the world to Felix, and he was all the world to me. For a long time we stood thus, and then he drew me to the sofa, and side by side we sat there, still too moved and happy to speak much, watching the pale flush in the west fade and fade into twilight. There came to us then the ideal moments which had been denied me that after-

noon. Perhaps I am wrong to use the word "ideal" in speaking of such moments. They are more than ideal, they are sacred. Felix and I saw more than the silent land and the lingering sun glory, we felt more than joy in each other. A cherub had come to us. We were gazing through its eyes. What we saw in them cannot be put into words, I think we were given a glimpse of the mysterious joy of Heaven, and I dimly divined that the key-note to it all was love. Our souls were lifted up, we were steeped in an extraordinary peace. Everyone must, I think, have known such moments. They come unexpectedly, it may be in the midst of busy life, it may be by the side of life passing away, they are the reward when our hearts have been deeply stirred and we have responded to an appeal to our best feelings. Strange we should ever fall back again to our lower selves after such experiences, but, alas! we do.

I cannot say how long we sat thus. The silent moments passed like a dream. Very strangely were they broken. A thin dark moving line appeared in the sky, coming straight towards the house; we watched it curiously where we sat facing the window. Nearer and nearer it drew, and soon we could make out the wings of birds, dark birds flying towards us in a line, swift as the wind. Another moment and they were circling round the house in a dark ring, uttering strange cries as they circled.

“The swifts, the swifts!” I cried. “Oh, Felix! I have never seen them here before. But I know them well. Just like this they used to circle and cry round my old home.”

As I spoke hot tears started to my eyes, and once more I was a child. I was lying in a small white bed by an open, ivy-framed window, happy, drowsy, and comfortable in the summer dusk, and past the window were skimming these same

wonderful birds, uttering the same strange shrill cries. And by my side sat my mother, holding my hand, and also watching the birds, for both of us loved them. There are two things that to this day never fail to bring the tears to my eyes. You will smile perhaps, reader, at my coupling them together; but one is beautiful church music, and the other is the cry of the swift as it circles in the dusk round the eaves where it builds its home. A harsh, screaming note it has been called, but never so to me, for all beauty lies in association, and to me the note is associated with everything that is lovely: childhood, and love, and happy beautiful summer.

We could scarcely take our eyes off the birds, so wonderful was their rapidity. Never once did they pause, or cease to utter their strange monotonous cry, but wheeled untiringly round, an ever moving dark and glossy circle.

"I *must* go," said Felix at length, taking out

his watch again and looking at it. "It is nearly eight o'clock."

"You must not leave before the swifts," I said, clinging to him.

"But swifts are late birds, and probably their nests are hard by. You see I don't know where mine is, I must go in search of it."

"Oh, Felix! I see now that you have given up a great deal for me. Am I worthy of it? Oh! I feel I am not half good enough for you. I am sure I disappoint you, once or twice to-day I have disappointed you bitterly. I am so full of faults, Miss Skinner always said so. Do *you* think you can go on loving me through all those years in which we shall have to wait for each other?"

"I could never lose my love for you, it is a peculiarly deep and tender feeling. You are such a lonely, unprotected little creature, and you have always thrown yourself so upon me

for love and sympathy. As for your faults, well, they might destroy my happiness, but they could not destroy my love."

"They shall not destroy your happiness. I know my faults, Felix. I am selfish, I am impatient, I have no powers of endurance, and I am capricious even with those I love. You have told me of these things yourself sometimes, and so, in a different way, has Miss Skinner. But indeed I have made efforts to cure myself of them, and now I will make very earnest efforts."

"Do, darling, for my sake."

"I will, for your sake."

"And now, dearest one, I think before I go I ought to see your uncle and Matthew, and tell them you are engaged to me. I must go through the form of asking your uncle's consent, if only to please him. Such as he is, he is your only protector."

I knew Felix had made a favourable impres-

sion upon both my uncle and Matthew, so I assented to this proposition, and together we left the library. Dinner was over, and in the dining-room we found Matthew, pouring out coffee, and my uncle stretching himself after his post-prandial nap.

He began to roll about and laugh when we appeared.

“Ha! Ha!” he said, “I see you’ve settled it, I hoped you’d settle it, I left you alone to settle it. Matthew wanted to go and fetch you at dinner-time; he has no tact, a very good fellow, but no tact. I wouldn’t let him call you, it might have prevented your settling it. Well? Have you quite done, young man?”

“I have,” answered Felix gravely. “Your niece has done me the honour to accept me. May I hope for your consent?”

“Most certainly. I am delighted. I give her to you with pleasure. Not that I mind main-

taining her, still she is an expense, and I am now a very poor man."

"I am afraid it will be some time—" began Felix.

"It needn't be any time. I disapprove of any delay. There's your bride, all you've got to do is to take her. She can go now; you can take her to-night."

I had hoped for acquiescence, but not quite such ready acquiescence as this. I grew crimson, the situation was so embarrassing, and looking helplessly at Felix I saw he was crimson also. Matthew came gallantly to the rescue.

"Impossible for the young Madam to go to-night, Sir," he said. "There must be a wedding first, and a trousseau, no one ever heard of a bride without a wedding and a trousseau. And a wedding and a trousseau mean money. I don't think you can afford either for some time, Sir, so much has been done on the common. Best wait

a bit, and in the meantime your relation can come down now and then, and pay his respects to you and Madam."

Looking much disappointed, my uncle conceded it might be as well to wait a year or so, if expense were involved. Then he yawned and seemed to have lost interest in our engagement. But he did not refuse his consent, or object to the proposed visits from Felix, which was all we cared about.

Then Matthew, more thoughtful than I, insisted on Felix's having some dinner before he went away. It was served in the library, and Felix and I ate it together. When it was over Felix asked me to leave the room, and he and Matthew had a long conversation together. After that came the moment of parting. I felt as if I could never let Felix go; but at last, in the honeysuckle porch, he tore himself away from me.

"Take care of my little girl, Matthew," he

said in a husky voice, and strode away across the dark common. I watched him until the darkness engulfed him, then sank down on the doorstep in a tempest of tears. And thus the day of betrothal ended, and the years of waiting began.

END OF BOOK II.



BOOK III.

THE PRIMROSE PATH.

Book III.

CHAPTER I.

THE years of waiting began.

I had spoken truly when I told Felix I had no powers of endurance. It was easy to promise to wait patiently when my lover was by my side, sustaining me and comforting me with his manly courage and love. Very different did I feel when he had gone, and I stood alone with the years lying like long dark shadows before me. A very small number of years will seem an eternity when one is young; it is when one begins to see the end, that the beat of time quickens. When I looked ahead, and thought of the interminable days and weeks which must

roll over my head before I could escape from my uncongenial life, a feeling of absolute despair came over me. Each day in the present was so long, I could not endure the thought of the hundreds and hundreds which must lag wearily by before any better life could come to me. At first I tried to cheer myself with the thought of the constant visits I should receive from Felix, but soon I learned his visits would have to be few and far between, and great then was the winter of my discontent. So short too, was each, visit, that close upon the pleasure of greeting followed the pain of farewell. True he wrote constantly, but letters were a poor substitute for himself, and the burden of them was ever the same. He was very busy; every hour was of value; it did not do for him to be away; he might lose valuable employment by not being on the spot; he could not afford to spare me much time just at present. I must wait patiently, and remember that every-

thing he was doing was done for me. He was working day and night, and leaving no stone unturned, in order to be able to give me a house as quickly as possible. In every letter he gave me the assurance of his deepest love; many girls might have made themselves happy having so sweet an assurance, but it was not enough for me. I wanted the presence of the man I loved as well as the assurance of his love. When with me he raised me to his own high level; after an hour or two of his company I generally got into a more or less exalted state of feeling, and felt ready to lay down my life for his sake; but when he left me, to wear through the long days alone, I dropped, a discontented being, to common earth.

I could not wait patiently, I rebelled against my whole life. It certainly was a strange and lonely life for a young girl to lead. I think I should have pined and fretted myself ill, had it not been for Matthew's thoughtful care. He

was constantly preparing little treats for me, some of them designed by himself, others the outcome of his conversation with Felix. For instance, every fortnight I was allowed to pack and send off a small hamper of good things to Miss Skinner and the girls, and this was a real pleasure. Miss Skinner never failed to send a grateful letter of acknowledgment, stamps being no consideration, for we always enclosed a few in the hamper. These letters, together with Felix's, were my sole links with the outer world.

I know now that the two men, Felix and Matthew, had me very much on their minds, and racked their brains for ways and means of making my life pleasant to me. It was more my wont at that time to take note of that which was lacking than of that which was done for me, but we see more clearly in after years. One very kind thing was done.

I had a great love for music and had often

regretted the absence of a piano in the castle. One day, after a long solitary afternoon walk, I wandered mopingly into the library. Was it a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain, or did I behold, standing against the wall, a piano? I stood and stared at it. Yes, a piano, a real piano, a beautiful little piano!

On the music-rest was a brand-new piece of music. I went up and examined it: "The Moonlight Sonata." On the title page was written, "With love from Felix," and inside the pages was a little note from the giver begging me to learn his favourite Sonata. I was delighted. It was the happiest moment I had had in the castle, save when Felix himself was with me. Books thus far had been my one resource within doors, music now would help me to while away the tedious hours. Day dreams arose before me of a dear little house in London, which would be mine some day, and of evenings when Felix

would sing with his divine voice, and I, a perfect musician, would play his accompaniments, or when he was tired, soothe him with the Moonlight Sonata. Here was something to do, something to work for whilst waiting. Every day I would practise for hours, and when the little home came and the evenings of song, the accompaniments should be worthy of the voice! Felix should be amazed!

I tried the piano, it was perfect; sweet, flexible, ringing. Then I rushed off to express my delight to Matthew. I found him behind the door, capering with suppressed excitement, and delighted at the success of his surprise. It transpired afterwards that Felix had bought the piano, and Matthew had paid for it. The money had been obtained in this way. A plantation of young trees had been made on the common, permission for it having been obtained of my uncle, through Matthew. Fifteen acres had been planted with Scotch and spruce firs. Of course my uncle held

himself responsible for the cost of the trees—thirty shillings the thousand—and the labour of planting. The conservators could not be expected to pay for improvements on his common. So Matthew was sent with the money—about sixty pounds—to pay the bill. A few days later the piano arrived, sent by the Lord of the Manor, in grateful recognition of the annuity which Mr. Lawrence Dillwyn so charitably and regularly remitted to him. This gift of the piano greatly softened my uncle's heart towards the Lord of the Manor. I never again heard him call the man a thief. Henceforth he regarded him simply as a pauper, wanting in pride, but not deficient in gratitude.

Yea, truly, Matthew knew how to catch a madman on the hip. The way he managed my uncle was wonderful. He used to try a little simple artfulness on me occasionally, but I was not so easily hoodwinked as he imag-

ined. For instance; in order to encourage me in cultivating my talents, he used to pretend he adored music. He would come into the library in the evening, when I was moping alone, and beg me to go and practise the Moonlight Sonata as he had taken such a fancy to it. I used to go at first, thinking he really had taken a fancy to it, and sometimes I used to get into the spirit of it myself and practise away hard, quite forgetting my audience, and Matthew would cry "Bravo! Bravo!" very enthusiastically whenever I came to a stop. But one evening, happening to look round whilst still continuing to play I caught the sly man quietly napping. I stopped. He instantly awoke and cried "Bravo!" most enthusiastically. After that of course I saw through him, and knew what his love for music was worth.

At tea-time, too, he used rather artfully to try and beguile me, but I think he succeeded better

then than over the music. We talked of Felix always at tea-time, and Matthew used to address me as Mrs. Gray so that I might get used to the title. We used to settle the details of my married life, and arranged a great deal together. It was determined that Felix and I should adopt the Shakspeare arms: gould, on a bend sable; and a speare of the first, the point steeled, proper. Our cat was to be called Mary Arden, and our dog Ann Hathaway. Our family also was to be modelled upon Shakspeare's, and was to consist of a son, Hamnet, and two daughters, Susanna and Judith, who would be our co-heiresses whether Hamnet died or not. Felix would, of course, have to make a will, and that will was only to differ from Shakspeare's will in one respect. Under Felix's will, Susanna and Judith would inherit the second-best bed, and the wife would come in for all the money. In Shakspeare's will, as you probably know, it was vice versâ. Of

course this was all pure nonsense, and I knew all the time that Matthew was simply humouring me, but it served to beguile a tedious hour.

So you see no efforts were wanting on Matthew's part to make my days bearable to me, but nothing could lull me into patience, or prevent my feeling miserable and lonely in Felix's absence. I craved for the gay companionship of someone young like myself. It was pain to me to go out and pass groups of merry young people, or parties of bright girls, riding together on the common, with laughter on their lips and gay jests for one another, whilst I prowled about with two old gentlemen, or else took my walks alone.

"If I could only have a companion, Matthew!" I exclaimed one day, flinging myself in an attitude of despair upon the library sofa. "I don't think Felix is ever coming to see me again. Here's the summer over, and he has only been down to see me five times. Five times in three months!"

"Dear Madam, wait a little. He was here a fortnight ago, and he said he hoped to be able to get away and come down here again next Sunday."

"Wait, wait! Yes, I can wait! So did the poor cat i' the adage."

"Recollect, Mr. Felix is so busy, Madam. It is very important he should be easily found if wanted now. He ought to be always on the spot. I happen to know he lost the chance of a pupil by coming down here the time before last. There are so many people seeking employment now in London, that if one man is out of the way there is always another at hand, eager to snap at the chance. Up there in the Metropolis they fight over a bit of work like dogs over a bone. It's a hard struggle for Mr. Felix to start. You see he has to work for his daily bread, as well as to fit himself for the Bar, the profession he means to follow. Try to be patient. The day will come when Mr. Felix will be a rich man,

and he'll come flying down here fast enough then."

"Oh, Matthew!" I groaned. "It is all very well for you to be patient; you are old, the hey-day in your blood is tame, but we young people cannot be expected to sit down to a miserable state of things quietly."

"But is it so miserable, dear Madam? Let me assure you that when you have had a little experience of life——"

"I don't want any experience of life," I said, tears of mingled petulance and weariness welling into my eyes as I spoke. "I want a companion. If Felix can't come why shouldn't I have somebody else? Why should I be condemned to solitary imprisonment here? I, who have been surrounded by young companions up till now. Miss Skinner's school was Paradise compared to this life. Good dinners and a fine house don't make up for loneliness."

"We do our best," said Matthew, looking very

mortified, "but I dare not admit strangers into this house. The master can only be managed up to a certain point. You may consider it very fortunate he took Mr. Felix into favour."

"Then if strangers are not permitted to come here and make my acquaintance, I'll go out and try to make theirs. I feel as if I could welcome even a wicked person, so tired am I of my own company."

"Oh, Madam! A wicked person!"

"Yes! so long as he or she were young and amusing."

Looking very hurt, Matthew left the room. I felt I had been rude to one who, though he could not make himself young, had been sparing of no efforts to amuse me, but it did not occur to me to run after him and say something pretty to make amends. Instead I sat down to practise Felix's beloved Sonata, and spoilt by breathings of my own impatience the calm moonlight beauty of the bars.

Once, when a child, I read a story of two scientific men who were travelling in a strange land. You must forgive me if I do not relate it correctly, the years since I read it are many and long. In some strange way these two men stumbled into Wish-land. The elder, who had a taste for animalcula, instantly wished for microscopic vision; the younger, who was interested in comets, etc., immediately requested he might be given telescopic powers of sight. Their wishes were granted, and an invisible power transported them home to their beds. On awakening next morning the elder was horrified to find leaning over him an appalling animal of gigantic proportions, calculated in every way to strike terror into the heart. For some minutes he lay paralyzed, then the monster gave a huge leap followed by a small but sharp bite, and slowly it dawned upon the terrified man that his sight was now microscopic and this was merely the *Pulex irritans*,

or Common Household flea. Life from that moment became loathsome, and meals had to be eaten with bandaged eyes. The younger fared no better. He had a lovely wife whom he adored, but henceforth when he wished to see her charming face he had to go by train to a great distance to get the proper focus, and carefully calculating the time, his wife had to climb a hill near her home and place herself in position thereupon. Even thus, he sometimes failed to catch sight of her.

The moral is obvious. We are given what is best for us by an omniscient power, and when we wander away into idle, rebellious Wish-land, we are fighting against the High Decree and making ourselves a pipe for Fortune's finger to sound what stop she please.

Like the scientific men, I wandered into Wishland. Too impatient to wait resignedly for my lover, I asked for a companion, anybody, even a wicked person so long as he were young and amusing.

He came, the son of Bacchus, treading on the heels of the son of Apollo. It was a few days after I had been so rude and ungrateful to Matthew. I had just ordered dinner, and was leaning out of a passage window on the first floor. The window was just above the honeysuckle porch, and on the lawn in front of the porch stood my uncle, with his hands under his coat tails, placidly waiting in the sun until Matthew should be ready for the morning prow. I watched him idly, thinking how benevolent and utterly unlike a madman he looked, when suddenly I saw him bristle up into intense excitement. A stranger was making his way towards the house across the private lawn. I think I have before mentioned that there was no path of any kind whatsoever leading up to the front of the house. It was all one large sweep of lawn, planted here and there with birch trees and marked off from the common proper simply by a low fence. There were plenty

of roads on his property, so said my uncle, why cut up a scrap of turf to make one more? He was very particular about this scrap of turf; woe betide any stranger who dared set foot thereon.

Knowing this, I leaned eagerly forward when I perceived the stranger, hoping for some fun.

“What do you mean by this intrusion?” shouted my uncle, advancing fiercely towards the intruder. “Are you aware that you are trespassing on my common?”

“I understood the common was recreation ground, open to all,” replied the stranger calmly.

His voice made me jump, for, lo! it was the voice of D’Arcy Leigh. I could see him clearly now, yes, strange but exciting, it was D’Arcy Leigh!

“My common is open to nobody,” almost shrieked my uncle, touched on his most vulnerable point. “It is my private property. If you want a public common go elsewhere. There are

plenty to be had : there's Clapham, Wandsworth, Putney, Barnes, Mitcham, Tooting, Streatham, Peckham Rye, and Goose Green. Go and cackle on Goose Green, Sir, that's the style of common to suit you."

This was decidedly one for my uncle. The lunatic was having the best of it. For a moment D'Arcy Leigh looked disconcerted, then a little giggle from me reached his ears and he looked up. His expression changed when his eyes fell upon me; discomfiture vanished, and his face brimmed over with mirth. A sudden inspiration came to me. "Uncle Lawrence," I called out, "there's a cat trespassing on the common at the back of the house. I believe it's the one you dislike so much, the one that frisks about in the mornings."

The thought of such daring impertinence was too much for my uncle. He darted away, round the corner of the house, like an antelope. D'Arcy

Leigh and I were left staring at each other. We both burst into a fit of laughter, then D'Arcy said:

"The old boy is very distinctly off his head."

"Oh, dear no!" I replied mockingly. "Simply an effect of humour which sometime hath his hour with every man. And what brings you here, my lord, to the vasty wilds of wide Arabia?"

"I have been ill and am recruiting my strength at a house in this neighbourhood. But I should not have accepted my friend's invitation if I had not bethought me of you. Do you remember giving me your address? I determined then to see you again, and this morning I came on a voyage of discovery; I had only just begun to realize I was treading a lawn when the old gentleman attacked me. But I am glad I came. You are prettier than ever. You are like a flower up there above the festoons of green. You really cannot be left to blossom alone."

“So others think. Many Jasons come in quest of me.”

This was not strictly true, for, so far, Felix had been the only Jason, but I felt it might be just as well to let this young fashionable think I was used to admiration.

“Hum! How’s Felix?” asked D’Arcy, the mirth vanishing from his face for a moment.

“He, good youth! He has—he has become a monk. Let me recommend the same line of action to you.”

“No, thanks, no monastic vows for me. A nunnery might suit me, but a monastery, never. But be serious a moment, time is short, and any moment Cerberus may return from chasing the cat. May I come and call upon you formally and properly, this afternoon?”

I hesitated. Instinct told me that neither my uncle nor Matthew would approve of him as a visitor to the castle.

"Cerberus is my uncle," I explained with some embarrassment, "and he doesn't much like strangers. He might think it presumption if you called. There's no knowing, he might grind you into a pulp with the dining-room poker."

D'Arcy laughed. "In that case," he said, "meet me out of doors, fair Juliet. I will come at any hour, short of midnight. Let me be your Romeo, do."

A most tempting idea. I looked down upon him contemplatively, and it struck me that he was well-looking enough, indeed might fairly be called handsome. There was something romantic about his proposal which appealed to my imagination. Why should I not give him a rendezvous that very evening? We might play at Romeo and Juliet very well at the back of the house. There was the balcony, and the nights were moonlight now, most propitious. It would be almost like the real thing. Still I hesitated.

Deep in my heart lurked the consciousness that to accede to this proposal would be treachery to the absent Felix.

"People wouldn't like me to do that," I answered uncomfortably.

"People need not know. I have heard a little about you from my friend, who knows you by sight, and I feel sure you must be miserable cooped up here with a lunatic and his keeper. You ought to be allowed to make acquaintances. It is a great shame you should be kept out of all society, and you are quite justified in making friends for yourself. There will be no harm in your keeping your little friendships secret, as your uncle is so—peculiar! Lunatics have to be humbugged: it is quite justifiable, in fact the only way to manage them."

"Quite so," I remarked more comfortably, for assuredly this was the principle Matthew went upon.

“Then say you will meet me. Don’t be afraid, I will take the greatest care of you. Remember, after all, you are a free agent. You will only be doing what a grown-up girl is quite entitled to do——”

So he went on urging me, until at length, overcome by his sophistries and my own strong inclinations, I stifled the shamefaced blushing spirit that mutinied in my bosom and arranged to meet him on the balcony at the back of the house at half past nine o’clock that evening. Then he went away, only just in time, for two minutes later my uncle re-appeared, very cross, and minus the cat.

And thus did I enter upon the primrose path.

CHAPTER II.

A SENSE of pleasurable excitement pervaded me the whole of that day. After so many monotonous weeks, broken only by rare visits from Felix, it was delightful to have in prospect such a novelty as a rendezvous by moonlight with a handsome young Romeo. What would it be like when it did take place? How would Romeo comport himself? For my part I determined to model myself as far as possible upon the original Juliet. To fit myself for the part I read through the play once more that afternoon. There were points which I thought might be improved upon: for instance, I determined to wear a glove, and

after it had pressed my cheek a little to give it to Romeo. Also, I resolved to introduce the Nurse as a figure in the balcony scene, her presence there would make the rendezvous more correct from a conventional point of view.

At nine o'clock I shut up the piano, told Matthew that I was tired and going to bed, and rushed off to my bedroom, taking care to lock the door behind me. I feared no discovery, for Matthew knew I always took good care to bolt my window safely before going to bed, and did not think it necessary to look after that any longer. Then for twenty minutes all was flurry and disorder. A dummy Nurse had to be made; no easy matter, for the only available materials were a bolster for the body, two umbrellas for the arms, a washhand-basin turned upside down for head, and legs fashioned out of the tongs and the poker. Still these effects, arrayed in a skirt and a shawl, had rather a human air when

placed on a chair on the balcony, just slightly in the background.

Next I arrayed myself. Juliet should have worn white satin and pearls, I had neither: but it is wonderful what can be managed with a little taste. A fine damask table-cloth, stolen from the linen press, looked really exceedingly well, draped in artistic folds around my slender figure, and a wreath of honeysuckle twined in and out of my flowing hair gave me quite a picturesque appearance. Much pleased with myself I glanced at the clock on the mantel-shelf. Half past nine: the hour had come. I lowered the lamp, and with slow, gliding steps moved to the window which opened to the ground.

“Ha! the Nurse looks well in the moonlight with her umbrella arms sticking straight out in front of her. Marry! but you were bravely done, and yet begot of nothing but vain fantasy! Be trusty, Nurse! nor tell the Capulet, or blistered

be thy tongue! And now for Romeo."

Still with slow and gliding step I moved out on to the balcony, then closed the casement behind me and arranged myself in a graceful attitude, leaning against the wooden balustrade with my elbow on the top rail and my cheek resting upon my gloved hand. It was only an old black cotton glove with holes in the fingers, but methought it did not look amiss in the moonlight. A light quiet footstep could be heard approaching.

"Oh, Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" I murmured, and as I did so, a pang shot through my heart, for I would have liked the light footstep to have been that of Felix. But there was no time for vain regrets, the only possible Romeo was already at the foot of the balcony steps. In my most dramatic voice I cried aloud:

"What man art thou, that, thus bescreen'd in night,

So stumblest on my counsel?

How cam'st thou hither, tell me? and wherefore?"

“Don’t you know me?” cried D’Arcy, springing gaily up and taking hold of my ungloved hand.

“This is the celebrated balcony scene. Go on. Say your part.”

“Oh, good gracious! I can’t spout Shakspeare in that style!” exclaimed D’Arcy, looking rather taken aback.

“Oh, yes, you must. Go on, say—‘With love’s light wings’”—

“Don’t know the thing.”

“Well then, say—‘Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear’”—

“Don’t know that either.”

“Can you say—‘Oh, that I were a glove’”—

“Awfully sorry, ’pon my word. I am afraid I make a poor Romeo. Mayn’t I talk in my own language?”

A sense of deep disappointment came over me. He was no better than a dummy himself, and the opening for bestowing the glove was

completely thrown away. Drawing my hand away from him pettishly, I said:

“If you can’t play Romeo I certainly do not see any use in staying to play Juliet. I’ll wish you good-night.”

“Oh, Miss Gwynne! Juliet! Don’t be so cruel. Stay a little while with me,” he entreated, trying to stop me as I turned away to leave him. “I’ll learn it all up against to-morrow, I will indeed, or any other play you like. Don’t go, there’s a dear girl. If you only knew how bewitching you look in that get-up! What is it? Not a table-cloth surely?”

He stepped backwards, the better to survey me, stumbled against the Nurse, and down came poker and tongs with a clatter.

“Good Heavens! What’s this? Another lunatic!” he cried, appalled for a moment, by the weird creature so suddenly brought before his notice.

"My Nurse," I observed, introducing her with a wave of the hand, "and you've knocked her legs down!"

I have never seen anyone laugh as D'Arcy Leigh did then; in fact he became quite hysterical over the washhand-basin. His merriment infected me, and it was some time before we could compose ourselves sufficiently to replace the legs. We became quite friendly over this operation, which was a troublesome one, for the legs would only stand in the shape of an inverted V. At length we left them so, looking irresistibly comic, and D'Arcy stifled a second fit of hysterics and came and sat down by my side on the top of the balcony steps. Finding Romeo was not equal to the occasion I graciously abdicated the *rôle* of Juliet, and condescended to become an ordinary mortal. We talked of a great many things, and D'Arcy questioned me closely as to my life and my uncle's eccentrici-

ties, and made himself fully acquainted with the situation. Then he turned the conversation upon Felix. I fought shy of the subject for some time, but my companion was an adroit questioner, he already knew a great deal, and by degrees he succeeded in eliciting from me all there was to tell.

“And so you have promised to wait for Felix,” he said musingly. “It’s a sad pity.”

The tone in which he said this was so unmistakably genuine that it impressed me. “Why a sad pity?” I asked.

“Why! Because you’ll both have to wait until Doomsday, or at best only come together when Felix is bald and decrepit, and you are wrinkled and old. What can Felix do now he is cast off by his grandmother? It is absurd to talk of the Bar: that profession is overcrowded already. It is a calling that only does for men who have money to fall back upon, and can afford to wait

for briefs. How do you suppose he is to live in the meantime, much less support a wife? No, my dear girl! Without his granny's consent that foolish young friend of ours will never be able to marry you, and that consent he will never get. The sooner you give up all thought of him, and the sooner he goes back to his granny, the better for both of you. He should never have asked you to wait for him. I call it selfishness to spoil your prospects in such a manner. Why, you've never seen the world! It is a shame to think of it! You, who with your beauty and fascination might marry anybody."

"I don't want to marry anybody," I answered, angered yet depressed by his words. "I intend to wait for Felix. I don't believe he will ever get bald; if he fades, he will fade in music. And I am not afraid of wrinkles; Felix will smooth them away with his dear kind hands. There is

no selfishness in him. You have no right to call his conduct selfishness. I do not like to hear Felix disparaged, and I shall go away."

"Oh, no! Don't go, please don't go. I did not mean to offend you. I really meant no disparagement of Felix. He is a very good fellow I know, and sings like an angel. I beg you not to go, just stay a few minutes longer."

"I think not. The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo."

"Just a minute or two," he pleaded, "we can't all be Apollos. Tell me, are you very fond of Felix?"

"Very."

"You could never forget him, and love anyone else?"

"Never, oh, never!"

"Lucky fellow: yet I understand he does not come very often to see you."

"He cannot come often. He has not the time."

"If I loved a girl, I'd be down every day to see her."

"Would you? How nice! But you haven't to earn your daily bread, have you?"

"No, thank goodness! or the daily bread would be a very small slice. I am glad to say I am a rich man, Juliet."

"Oh, dear!" I sighed regretfully. "What a pity you aren't Felix! I mean, what a pity Felix isn't you; no, I don't mean that either. I mean what a pity Felix is not rich like you and cannot come every day to see me. I am so lonely here; oh, you don't know how lonely I feel."

"Let me come and see you," said D'Arcy eagerly. "I can't take Felix's place of course, but I might come and amuse you whilst he is busy working. In that way you will have us both: Felix as your *fiancé* and me as your friend. I'll come constantly, every day if you like. I'll bring you all sorts of pretty things that will please

you from town. It will be so nice. Tell me, may I come?"

It was a great temptation. As he had said; it would be so nice. But deep within me still lurked the irrepressible consciousness that this clandestine friendship I was forming was treachery to the absent Felix. It was the faintest of heart murmurs, but though I disregarded it, it was there. I hesitated, then rather feebly I said, as I had said, in the morning:

"People wouldn't like it." To which D'Arcy gave the same reply, that—

"People needn't know."

It did not take him long to convince me that there would be no harm in keeping our meetings a secret from my uncle and Matthew. Of what use to take a lunatic into one's confidence, as he said, and Matthew who systematically deceived his master could hardly complain if he were in turn deceived by his master's niece. I felt there

was a flaw in this reasoning somewhere, but I let myself be convinced. It took a little longer to convince me that we should be justified in keeping Felix in ignorance of our meetings, but even that was done at last. As D'Arcy said, it might fret him to think that others were enjoying my society whilst he could not, and it was a pity to fret the poor fellow unnecessarily. He could be told of our friendship later on, when he was in a better and happier position. Then of a surety he would not mind, for all would have ended well, and being so unselfish he would only be glad the weary time of waiting had been lightened for me by a friend.

It was decided that it would be best not to risk any more meetings so near the house, or at so late an hour. In future, all meetings were to take place at three in the afternoon, on the further side of the windmill. This hour would give D'Arcy plenty of time to get down from

town, when he was no longer staying in Wildacre, and would admit of my spending two hours with him before returning to the castle to tea.

“And now,” I said, springing to my feet, “I must really depart.”

“Very well,” answered D’Arcy, rising reluctantly, and eyeing me keenly as I stood before him in the moonlight. “I must let you go now, I suppose, but I could stay here for ever. Tell me, beautiful nymph, why do you wear that little black glove on your left hand; is it to hide an engagement ring?”

It was mortifying to have to explain that I did not possess an engagement ring. D’Arcy seemed quite surprised.

I thought every girl was given a diamond ring as a matter of course when she became engaged,” he said. “I should not like my *fiancée* to go without one. But I suppose poor Felix

can hardly be expected to bestow diamond rings upon his lady-loves."

"His lady-loves!" I exclaimed indignantly, "he has but one, and that's me. How do you know he can't give me a diamond ring? I fully expect he is going to give me one: you shall see if he doesn't." And mentally I vowed that Felix should give me one, and that it should be shown in triumph to his detractor very soon.

Then D'Arcy humbly begged my pardon for imagining Felix could not give me diamonds, and asked for the little black glove as a token of forgiveness, and a souvenir of the evening. So he got it after all, though not in the way I had intended.

I watched him steal quietly away, then opened my casement and carried the Nurse back into my room. I had just put her legs back into the grate, and was busy removing her umbrella arms when I was startled by a sudden shadow

from without which fell upon the dimly burning lamp. Involuntarily I turned towards the open window, then stood petrified, an umbrella in either hand, and wished I could have changed shapes with Proteus, for Matthew stood in the opening.

Once before he had appeared there; in a dream, as an angel, with great wings that streamed far out into the night. There were no wings now, yet it seemed to me in the confusion of the moment that there was something supernatural about Matthew as he stood in the opening, a black, clearly defined figure, with the moon peeping in over his left shoulder. He was a true angel if I had only known it; a guardian and, alas! a sorrowing angel. But I was too blind to recognize it then.

“Oh, Madam!” cried Matthew, and there was a ring of actual grief in his tone. “Oh, dear young Madam! What is this?”

“Merely a Moonlight Sonata,” I answered,

trying to carry the matter with a high hand.

“Child! Child! How could you? To meet him, a stranger, at this hour! Just outside your own little sacred chamber, quite alone, and unknown to everybody.”

“My Nurse was with me,” I remarked, trying to speak jauntily, and pointing to the now memberless trunk with the left umbrella.

“A strange young man! A young man of bad character, or he would never have come secretly at such an hour.”

“You are mistaken. He is a member of the aristocracy, and a merrier man within the limits of becoming mirth I never spent an hour’s talk withal.”

“It does not matter who he is, Madam, aristocrat or not, his conduct stamps him. And that *you* should deceive us so, when we have tried to do so much to make you happy. You, a betrothed young lady!”

“You have no right to talk to me about deceit,”

I exclaimed, recalling suddenly one of D'Arcy Leigh's arguments. "Who deceives my uncle? How about the '47 port from the old lady, and the legs of lamb from the riding-master, and the rhubarb from the grocer? How about the Lord of the Manor's annuity? How about plantations and"—I stopped short when I came to the word pianos. The piano had been got for *me*.

It had all been said hastily, and the words had hardly escaped me before they were regretted. Matthew started as if he had received a sudden blow. I felt rather than saw that he was flushing violently, and a sudden sympathy sent the blood rushing into my own cheeks. For a moment there was silence, and it seemed to me that the moon looked down upon me with cold displeasure over Matthew's shoulder.

"You have said a cruel and ungrateful thing," said Matthew at length, in a husky voice, "and it is undeserved on my part. I am in authority

here; for years I have had charge of the master and his affairs, and I have tried to be a good and faithful steward. God alone knows the strain it has been upon me, may you never feel it, Madam. And He knows that I have put by nothing for myself, but keep only the yearly wage I had at the beginning, so anxious am I not to abuse my trust. My master is to me a most sacred charge; I will say it this once, I have sacrificed my life for him. And now you have come, a poor, lonely, unguided young thing, I have accepted you as another charge, sent me also by God. I do what I can for your happiness, it is my duty; also it is my duty to look after you, my poor master being what he is, and, Madam, I will continue to do my duty, though you call me deceitful, and cut me to the heart by your most unkind words."

I gave a remorseful cry, and flung down the umbrellas. "Oh, Matthew, Matthew, don't say

any more!" I exclaimed, rushing up to him and seizing his poor cold trembling hands. "I never really thought you deceitful, it was only that it seemed convenient to say so just then. I think you are an angel, I do indeed. You are too good, you sacrifice yourself more than anyone I have ever known in my life. You do your duty splendidly; you are the kindest of friends. Next to Felix I like you better than anyone in the world. Oh, do forgive me, dear kind Matthew! I know my uncle must be managed, he cannot be allowed to starve himself, he, a rich man! he has to be treated like a baby. I feel I have said a cruel thing, but indeed I am not cruel or ungrateful in my heart. Oh, say you forgive me!"

"Yes, Madam, I will forgive you," answered Matthew, a little wearily.

I felt more comfortable now I had obtained his forgiveness, and thought I would try to end a rather painful interview. "Don't you think

you'd better go to bed, Matthew," I suggested, "you sound so tired."

But Matthew was not to be put off in that way. "No, Madam," he said, "the matter cannot end like this. Either you must promise me this bad young man shall never come here again, or Mr. Felix must be informed of your conduct."

"Oh, no! please don't tell Felix!" I cried in alarm, for the serious way in which Matthew regarded my escapade made me feel I must indeed have done a very wrong thing which might make Felix very displeased with me. "Don't tell Felix. I promise he shall never come here again."

"Very well, Madam, I will accept that promise. But *if ever you break it*, Matthew will not forgive, and Mr. Felix shall at once be told all. Remember that. Oh, dear! To think that you, possessing his love, should ever care to see another, and that other, one who can steal away, as I saw him steal, like a thief in the night."

Having said this, Matthew went away, first waiting to see that I carefully barred the casement shutters. That was one disadvantage in a room opening upon a balcony which communicated with the ground. However beautiful and soft the summer night might be, the window must be closed and safely bolted. I felt impatient at having to shut out the moonlight, and knocked aside the Nurse's body so hastily that the wash-hand-basin went spinning across the floor. Then I sat down on the chair of the deceased, and began to reflect on the events of the evening. How annoying that Matthew should have discovered us! It would have been so nice and amusing to have had D'Arcy Leigh as a friend. Now, of course, I could see him no more. I had promised. What had I promised? Why, only that he should never come here again. Here, meant this balcony. I had never said he should not come to the further side of the windmill. That would be

an altogether different affair. Hour and place would be quite different, and it was the hour and place chosen that had apparently so shocked Matthew to-night. Surely there could be no harm in meeting an acquaintance on the common in the sunshine! Matthew had made far too much fuss over the affair. It was absurd. Matthew took too much upon himself. He was but a servant after all, and my neck should be put in the yoke by no serving man. I should do just as I liked.

The lamp went out with a sudden flicker. Half frightened I undressed rapidly, and crept into bed in the darkness. No, of course I must not meet D'Arcy anywhere, it would be very wrong. Some supernatural power would punish me if I did such a thing. It would be breaking my promise, breaking it in the spirit. To think that I, possessing Felix's love, should even care to see another!

I did not leave the house on the afternoon of the next day. Neither did I go the day after. But, alas! on the afternoon of the third day, weary of my uncle, weary of Matthew, weary of myself, I stood with D'Arcy Leigh on the further side of the windmill.

CHAPTER III.

FELIX came the following week and spent a whole day with me. He was kinder than ever, sweet and musical as bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair. He brought with him a most lovely diamond ring, which he placed tenderly on the third finger of my left hand. A symbol of his love for me, he said it was to be, until the happy day when he could place there a more beautiful symbol, the plain gold circlet which would make us one for ever. I knew I should get it! Never once in my knowledge of Felix had he refused any request of mine he could possibly grant; and when I wrote and told him

I was longing for an engagement ring, a ring of diamonds such as other girls received when they became engaged, I felt certain it would be given me. Generous-hearted Felix! He would have adorned me from head to foot in beautiful things had he been able. I did not need to be told that, although he assured me of it again and again.

We had a family luncheon, and spent the afternoon out of doors, returning home only in time for dinner. Felix was looking slightly pale this time, and it struck me that he was thinner than he had been wont to be in the Exbourne days. I commented upon this when we sat together in the library after dinner.

"You see, dearest, I am working very hard now," said Felix, "and I daresay it has taken a little out of me. And my rooms are small, and in a very crowded part of London, which is rather trying after breezy, refreshing Exbourne.

But I am quite well. Hard work does not kill a man, especially when he has a sweet hope beckoning him on in the distance."

"What is your work?" I asked, "and how do you earn your daily bread? I hope it is not a very small slice."

Felix smiled. "I manage to live," he answered, "don't trouble your little head about that, Rosamund. I have begun writing for the press, and an article I have written has been accepted by the "Fortnightly," which I consider quite a feather in my cap. Also I have some pupils, and hope to get more. So you see what with literary work, and tutoring, and dinners at my Inn of Court, and the necessary reading for the Bar my time is not at all my own, and I cannot get away to see my own little love as often as I should like to. I wish you could have some pleasant companion, dearest; Matthew tells me you feel the need of young companionship. I

don't want my Rosamund to get dull and moped."

The conversation had touched dangerous ground. Ignoring these last remarks of Felix's, I turned it into its former channel.

"And how long will it be before you become a real barrister, and can make that dear little home?"

"Oh, my sweet one, I wish it were not so hard to say. I cannot be called to the Bar for three years. There are terms to be kept, twelve terms, four each year, so you see it cannot be done sooner. Then it will take me a year or so to get into practice, but we will not look beyond the three years now. We will be hopeful and consider it the limit of our waiting. I shall be a real barrister then, and I am beginning to hope I may score some literary successes, and make a substantial income by my pen. We will say three years. Can you wait three years, Rosamund? It will pass sooner than you think, and

then you will only be twenty. Just a little patience and we shall be so happy together."

"I wish I could work to help you," I exclaimed eagerly.

"Each of us has something to do for the other. I have to work, you to wait."

"It is much easier to work than to wait."

"Only three years, Rosamund, and then such a long time stretching beyond. Years and years of happiness, I hope. Think of it! The dear little home, the music, and above all the love."

I tried to picture it, but it seemed a long way off, and meanwhile—Felix seemed to guess my thoughts. He did so sometimes in a startling manner.

"Meanwhile, darling, the waiting must be made as pleasant to you as possible. The piano is a pleasure, is it not? I'll bring down some songs next time I come, and you can play my accompaniments for me—Let me see now, what do you

do all day when you are alone? What distractions have you?"

Dangerous ground again. My greatest distraction had probably been awaiting me that afternoon beyond the windwill, and fuming at my non-appearance. But I felt Felix would be highly displeased if he knew that. Once more I changed the conversation.

"Where has your gold watch-chain gone?" I asked, fingering nervously a little bit of black cord on Felix's waistcoat which conveniently attracted my attention at that moment. "Why Felix! All your gold things are gone! Your chain, and your gold studs, and your beautiful ring with the crest upon it!" I spoke in genuine astonishment, forgetful of all else in my surprise at seeing the point-device Felix with common bone studs in his cuffs, and a piece of black cord at his button-hole.

He turned crimson, and this time it was he

who tried to change the conversation, but I was not to be put off easily.

“Dearest, I had to part with them, don’t ask me more,” he said at length, with a gesture which showed the subject was distasteful to him. “Go and play the Moonlight Sonata to me, that I may hear how you are getting on. That opening part is so marvellously soothing, I could listen to it for ever.”

Ignorant that any sacrifice had been made for me, I sat down to play the favourite Sonata. Felix lay full length on the sofa as if glad to rest, and listened. The beautiful music had a new meaning for me as I played that night. There was inspiration in Felix’s appreciative presence, never before had I played so well. The evening was closing into darkness and the room was full of dark shadows, but sweet shadows that had no terrors, for one who loved me lay amidst them. My uncle lay asleep in another

room, the house was very still; without was the dusky, far-reaching common. Hallowed and gracious was the time....

Rise, O Moon. Rise with stately slowness over the mountains. Rise over the waters, and turn them into silver. Pass with majestic sweep above the clouds. Sing to us as you move onwards, sing to us airs from Heaven. Make earth drowsy with the harmony. The celestial music comes floating down, a soft soothing song, lulling into happiness and rest. Through the sweet strain runs a touch of mystery which grows and grows. Suddenly the music swells. The moon is high up in heaven now, and the sweet song is drowned in a grander strain which rolls ceaselessly on, almost overpowering the listening ear. The stars have joined their voices, this is the music of the spheres. I hear other voices: voices that have a human ring, nearer, dearer than moon or stars. Who is that singing? A strain of measureless

content. It is the voice of the loved one I lost so long ago. Oh, she is so happy, so happy! She weeps no more, not even for her little daughter; all is rapturous joy. And, oh, strange and wonderful! in that wild crying I seem to recognize the unknown voice of my poor father. There are shadows in Heaven too, but sweet shadows that have no terrors, for the tender Shepherd is amidst them. It is He has stilled the loved one's weeping, and now He is listening to that wild crying. Louder and louder grows the music. This is the sublimest strain of all. But how is it that I am up in Heaven, and yet down here in a dark little room, with all my heart going out to one who lies in the shadows behind me? What is the golden cord that makes me, and the music, and the lost ones, and Felix, one? Is it love? Is all love, human and divine, one and the same thing? Is it the sublimest strain of all?

The Sonata is ended. The loved one's voice has gone too high. I can hear it no longer. The wild crying is stilled. Through the dark shadows I creep back to where Felix is lying. He clasps me in his arms. The Dream King comes and stands over us and waves his magic wand. The dark room vanishes, the three years have passed away. Ours is the dear little home, and the music, and above all the love.

Is it well to be poetical and imaginative by nature? Touchstone evidently thought so. He says to Audrey, "Truly I would the gods had made thee poetical." To which the plain simple wise happy Audrey made answer: "I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?"

The gods made me poetical. All my life I have been peculiarly sensitive to the influences of music and poetry, and things beautiful. Bring the glamour of poetry into my life and I rise at once

upon its wings to unwonted heights, but take it away, and I drop. Well may I now ask like Audrey, "Is it a true thing?"

Reader, can you believe that after that loving visit of Felix's, after all the sweet hopes he had held out to me, with happiness coming towards me courting me in her best array, I could ever again clandestinely meet D'Arcy Leigh. I did meet him. Only three years to wait, and then, "such a long time stretching beyond", but I had not the patience to wait contentedly even three days. Drawn irresistibly by the longing for a little mirth and bright companionship, before a third day had passed over my head I stood at the meeting-place proudly displaying my diamond ring. Flaunting in the face of a forbidden acquaintance the sacred symbol of Felix's love for me.

A ring that had cost Felix much, as I know now to my bitter shame. He sought to hide his sacrifices from me, but time has revealed them,

and they shine across the years bathed in the light of purest, most unselfish love. He parted with more than his gold things. Every nice little personal appointment had he parted with, so that I might have a diamond ring such as rich men give when they become engaged. And at that time he was living in small poor rooms, working late into the dreary nights, almost destitute of money. It pierces my heart to think of it. The ring is on my finger now, I never have worn, never shall wear any other, but for years every flash of the bright stones which caught my eye gave me a stab of pain and bade me remember what I had thrown away; the dear little house, the music, and above all the love.

A year passed away and once more costly summer was at hand. All through the dull autumn days, and the cold foggy London winter, and the slowly awakening spring, Felix slaved; so that at the end of three years he might be

able to place a little gold circlet on my finger, and take me for ever to his home. When he could he ran down to see me, but these days, generally Sundays, came sadly seldom, so rarely had he time for a holiday. He grew very thin and pale that winter; at sight of his poor looks my heart smote me uneasily many a time, but never once did he lose his bright brave spirit. Ever when he spoke his words bade me be of good cheer, for his pen was doing successful work, and money and fame would be surely his before long. One sad thing happened during that year. Poor Miss Skinner died in the spring, just when the crocuses, her favourite flowers, were about to blossom. I wept for her. No more fortnightly packing of hampers now, no more news of the girls, no more grateful letters; and one tie less with the old life and the outer world. But now I am glad Miss Skinner lies quiet in her grave. Nothing can touch her

further. No more will she skimp and go hungry, no more toil through the weary terms with the dreadful spectre of the workhouse standing at the end of them. No, after life's fitful fever, she sleeps well. There will be great joy for her when she wakes, of that we may be certain. Please God her brother will be there to take her gently by the hand and lead her forth amongst the eternal flowers of Heaven.

And now I come to myself and will tell you how the year passed with me. In that year I took great strides towards womanhood. I grew and developed a great deal, and to please Felix I put my hair up, twisting it into a Greek coil at the back of my head. This transformed me at once from the child to the maiden. Also Matthew arranged for me a dress allowance out of the Lord of the Manor's annuity, and I now wore long skirts and pretty girlish dresses made for me by a dressmaker who was smuggled in

at the back door. These dresses were duly admired by my uncle as the gifts of the golf players, in grateful recognition of his kindness in allowing them to play golf on his common. I was strangely pretty at this time. It is not conceit to say so, I was really rather indifferent as to my looks, but I could not fail to perceive the effect they had upon others. Strangers would nudge each other, and turn to look after me when they passed me on the common; I saw admiration in Felix's eyes whenever he looked at me, Matthew's eyes seemed to love to dwell upon me, and even my uncle expressed his pleasure in the Valkyrie.

But there was one who expressed his admiration more fully and freely than any. I still clandestinely met D'Arcy Leigh. Time in those early days laid tender beautifying hands upon my person, but left my character unchanged. I still loved Felix more than anyone in the world,

but I was as capricious, as impatient, and as wanting in fortitude and strength of mind as ever. I still rebelled against the dull cramped life at the castle, chafed beneath my uncle's flow of unreasoning chatter, treated with disdain Matthew's attempts at companionship, and sickened of the wearisome daily prowls and long lonely evenings. All was well when Felix came, but, oh, the days without him! I could not bear the wearisome monotony of the life; somewhere I had to find distraction, and an outlet for the youth which was fretting and burning within me.

I found what I wanted in D'Arcy. He was ever ready, always willing to be my slave. Our meetings became a matter of course. He had his settled days on which he never failed to come. At first we were very careful, but as time went on we grew so reckless, the marvel was that Matthew did not hear of us through some gossiping quarter, or discover us himself. We took long walks

together, often wandering beyond the limits of the common into a neighbouring park, and D'Arcy used to bring little baskets from town with him, the contents of which we used to enjoy in the woods. Delicious strawberries and grapes and peaches, and all manner of sweets from Fuller's, and often a little bottle of sparkling champagne, which I preferred infinitely to '47 port. One day we chanced upon the entrance to the sweet arcades I had been so anxious to show to Felix. They took D'Arcy's fancy, he marked the spot carefully, and afterwards it became one of our favourite resorts.

Never once did I take Felix there. Some indefinable feeling, I think now it was shame, prevented me.

One thing alone can I plead in extenuation, mark, I do not say justification, of my conduct at this time. I was so ignorant of the world and its conventionalities that I did not realize the full impropriety of my conduct, or understand in the

least the game D'Arcy was playing. He was to me simply a distraction. I never thought of him as more than a kind amusing young fellow, who had taken pity on me in my loneliness, and wished to be considered my friend. Of course I know now that he was trying to win my heart. He wished to oust Felix and take his place. In short, he was very much in love with me, and intended to marry me. He dared not show his hand openly yet: he knew that would frighten me away at once and for ever, so he bided his time, and tried to make himself indispensable to my happiness. Not once did he reveal his real feelings throughout the year, all was cleverly done under the name of friendship. Very free and merry was our intercourse with one another, but no word or touch from D'Arcy had yet awakened me to a true apprehension of the situation.

I wronged Felix deeply by these secret meetings, but in my heart I was never false or disloyal to

him. There were even times when I longed to tell him all, and to beg permission to continue openly these merry picnics which so pleasantly broke the monotony of my weary waiting, but fear prevented me; fear lest he should treat the matter gravely like Matthew, and be very angry, and possibly not forgive. For the deceit had gone on long now, and there was the promise to Matthew of a year ago which in spirit had been broken. No, if Felix knew all, he might not forgive. The primrose path is very easy to enter upon, but the longer it is trodden, the more difficult it is to break away from it.

There came a day when discovery seemed perilously near. It was a Friday in the summer, my second summer at the castle. Felix had come down, taking me by surprise, which was not his usual custom. He said the heat in London was fearful, and had given him a headache for several days, therefore, though work pressed, he

had thought it wise to take a day's holiday and refresh himself with a sight of his little love. He looked so pale that Matthew made him take a brandy-and-soda, and rest awhile in an armchair. Whilst he rested I ran upstairs. In ten minutes I re-appeared, clad in a new summer dress of coolest, palest green, and on my head a hat which with infinite difficulty my dressmaker had procured for me ; picturesque in shape and trimmed with a beautiful wreath of rosemary and pansies.

"I have put on these new things for you, Felix," I said, dancing up to him, "that I may be very refreshing to your poor tired eyes. Tell me, which refreshes you most, your little love, or Matthew's brandy and soda?"

"My little love," answered Felix, rising and coming towards me with a bright tender smile. "She is fresh as morning roses tipped with dew."

"No more need for this!" remarked Matthew, putting by the brandy, I won't say with a wink,

but certainly with one auspicious and one dropping eye. Then with an indulgent smile he discreetly withdrew.

“You don’t often quote Shakspeare,” I said, smiling happily at Felix, “but that was very pretty. See here—I want you to look at my hat. I have adopted these flowers as my badge: there’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance; and there is pansies, that’s for thoughts. We have all our favourite flowers; poor Miss Skinner loved her crocuses beyond every flower in the world, I love these. I love them for Ophelia’s sake, she gave them such sweet meanings.”

“They shall be my favourites also,” said Felix, kissing me gently, and gazing at me as if his eyes could never take their fill. “The knight shall adopt his lady’s badge. No flowers save these shall ever be worn by me again. They shall be a token and a sign between us that we love each other. The pansies shall mean that

our thoughts are bound up in each other; the rosemary that our remembrance of one another can never die. Shall it be so, Rosamund?"

For answer I took off my hat and kissed the flowers which for me had sweeter meanings now than ever.

After luncheon, during which my uncle was very troublesome, Felix insisted on taking me out for a stroll on the common to get some fresh air. I went forth reluctantly, being uneasy about D'Arcy. It was his day for coming, and having been taken by surprise myself, I had not been able to warn him Felix would be here. What was to be done? He would be certain to turn up. Friday was known to be a busy day with Felix and therefore considered safe. To add to the danger, D'Arcy had of late grown so reckless he no longer waited quietly for me on the further side of the windmill, but roved about on the open where I could see him directly

I got away from the house. Yes, there he was, calmly pacing the turf not two hundred yards away. How could he be so daring! He was to be seen before we had left the house five minutes. I hoped he would turn away when he perceived my companion, and perhaps escape recognition, but to my amazement he did not. He stood looking our way for a moment, then came straight towards us.

CHAPTER IV.

I GREW crimson with fright.

“Who is it?” asked Felix, “someone you know, Rosamund? Why, it’s D’Arcy Leigh! What can he be doing here?”

I murmured something, I know not what, in reply. Fortunately Felix was too occupied with the advancing figure to notice my confusion. On came D’Arcy looking very alert and smart. I don’t think I have ever described his appearance; let me do so now. He was a typical Londoner, you can meet a hundred like him in the Park in the season. Not for a moment could he be compared with Felix, who had a very marked indi-

viduality, and would be noticed in any crowd. Still, he was good-looking on the whole: he was rather tall, carried himself well, and wore faultlessly cut clothes. His features were insignificant, a dark moustache hid his upper lip, and his eyes were dark, bright, and restless, the kind of eyes that take everything in, and perceive an advantage at a glance. His manner, always self-assured, was strikingly so as he came up to us. Indeed, under the perilous circumstances it struck poor little quaking me as marvellous.

“Fancy meeting you here, Gray!” he exclaimed, shaking Felix effusively by the hand. “Truly this is a surprise. Very glad to see you again. I began to think you had vanished from the land of the living.”

Then he seemed to perceive me for the first time, and gave a little start, and half lifted his hat, as though not quite certain whether he knew me or not. Felix could hardly avoid introducing

him after this hint, but I fancied he did so reluctantly.

“Mr. Leigh,” he said. “I think, Rosamund, you met him at my grandmother’s a year ago, Miss Gwynne, Leigh.”

D’Arcy gave me a highly ceremonious bow. “I remember you now perfectly,” he said, looking at me with an expression which told me he was relishing the humour of the situation immensely. “You apostrophized a strong drink remotely connected with the juniper tree, and made a great sensation.”

I blushed a little at this reminiscence, and glanced in a shamefaced way at Felix. Then the humour of the situation began to strike me also, and the blush was supplanted by a giggle. There was no danger in the situation now D’Arcy had so cleverly taken the initiative. I felt quite at my ease again.

“You have changed a good deal since that

day," pursued D'Arcy. "I could not have believed one year would have made such a difference in anybody. You were almost a child then, now—" here he made a dramatic and significant pause, and looked at me with bold and undisguised admiration.

"Are you visiting in this neighbourhood?" asked Felix stiffly, and by his tone I knew he did not like D'Arcy to stare at me in that way.

"Down here for a garden party at Sir L——'s," answered D'Arcy carelessly, "but in no hurry to turn up there; so nice on this common. What are you doing with yourself, by the bye? I hear most absurd reports about you. One is that you have turned penny-a-liner and are living in Pimlico, but of course no one believes it. You would hardly have been so foolish as to desert the stalled ox for such dried herbs as that. I can't say you look as if your present life agreed with you, whatever the lines in which it may be cast."

Here his eyes wandered almost superciliously down the length of Felix's figure, as if taking in every detail of his appearance. Involuntarily my eyes followed in the same direction, and for the first time it struck me that Felix was absolutely shabby. His clothes looked rubbed and worn in the bright sunshine and compared disadvantageously with D'Arcy's. I think Felix read our thoughts, for a flush rose to his forehead, but he answered with an air that would have done honour to a prince.

"Thank you for taking such unusual interest in me, Leigh. Let me assure you I find dried herbs most satisfactory; but if you really are curious about my private affairs I shall have much pleasure in giving you any information you may desire."

"Certainly not, my dear fellow," answered D'Arcy imperturbably, "I really am not inquisitive, sorry I gave you that impression." Then turning again to

me he said, "Do you live here, Miss Gwynne?"

I explained that I lived at the castle, with difficulty suppressing a laugh.

"Oh, indeed!" cried D'Arcy with quite an air of interest. "I come down here sometimes, but never dreamt you were in the neighbourhood. Are you going to Lady L——'s 'at home' by any chance?"

I gave him the news that I was allowed to make no acquaintances, and went nowhere.

"What a shame!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as indignantly as if he had not known it before. "Why, your guardians are as selfish as the ogres in the fairy tales who shut up pining maidens in castles for their own delectation, and never let them see the outside world. Afraid, I suppose, some knight might fall in love with them, and carry them off to happiness and freedom."

I saw Felix flush again at this, and began to perceive that D'Arcy's remarks were intentionally disagreeable.

“There is no ogre,” I said impetuously, “and I have my own true knight who will take me away when the time comes.”

“Oh! glad to hear it,” said D’Arcy, looking very disconcerted. “I hope he will not keep you long waiting.” Then, rather hastily, he made his adieux and left us.

Felix and I walked on silently side by side. The sweet music of the morning was marred. An unpleasing sharp had wandered into it, and still vibrated in the air. Though I had resented D’Arcy’s remarks, it seemed to me there was truth in them. I certainly was like the pining maidens in the fairy tales. Was I not shut up in a castle, and forbidden all communion with my fellow-creatures? and, after all, was there much to choose between a madman and an ogre?

I grew more and more discontented with my lot, as I walked on, studying the points of resemblance between myself and the fairy-tale

maidens. Presently my mind reverted to D'Arcy's supercilious survey of Felix, and I broke the silence.

"Felix," I said, taking hold of his coat and pouting, "why don't you get nice smart clothes like Mr. Leigh's? I don't like this mean furniture and poor array."

"Dearest," he answered. "I can't help it. I can't afford new clothes just now," and by his tone and expression I knew that he had been aware of his own shabbiness, and was deeply mortified that I should have noticed it. His answer gave me a slight shock. Felix was so reserved about his own private life that I never even guessed at the deprivations he had to endure. For the first time I now realized he must be painfully short of money. I opened my lips to say something kind and comforting, but he gave me no time."

"You see, dear," he continued, "I have fees to

think of. A man reading for the bar has about £40 to pay on entrance. That I had to borrow and have only just paid back. Then there will be £100 to pay on call which I must be ready with. All this involves most careful living and saving, so I must not spend a penny more on myself than is absolutely necessary."

I gave a deep sigh and forgot the kind remark I had intended to make. "It appears to me," I said, "that I shall have to wait until Doomsday before my knight can afford to fetch me away from this dreary old castle, or at best we shall only come together when we are bald and decrepit and wrinkled and old. The bar is absurd. It is a calling that only does for men who have money to fall back upon."

Felix looked at me as if my remarks had both surprised and pained him. It certainly would not have occurred to me to make them, had they not been put into my head by D'Arcy.

"I do think your grandmother might help you a little," I continued. "Does she take absolutely no notice of you?"

"She has gone abroad and we never meet, but she writes at intervals," answered Felix, constrainedly.

"And what does she say?"

"Always the same thing: that she is waiting and longing to receive me back into her favour, but can only do so on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That I give you up and marry my cousin."

I was silent a moment. It was borne in upon me suddenly that Felix too had his ogre, and that moreover there was a beautiful maiden he could have, who would come to him with riches in her lap and fill his life with pleasure. He had only to go back to his grandmother and all need for toiling and slaving would be over. No shabby clothes then; all the luxuries he had

been accustomed to would be his once more.

"You had better give me up and go back, I think," said I, hot tears starting to my eyes.

"Give you up!" exclaimed Felix, coming to a startled standstill amongst the gorse-bushes. "Rosamund! How can you suggest such a thing? Give you up, who are dearer to me than life; my own little love of so many years! Why life would be an arid desert to me without you. I should not care to live. I am bound up in you. All my hopes are centred in you. You are my only joy. My own heart's darling, we shall not have to wait until we are wrinkled and old, unless something very unforeseen happens. Trust me for that. If I can not only live but save £140 before my career at the bar has even begun, surely once I am started I can offer you a little home. I shall not have to wait long for briefs. I have good interest and kind friends amongst the solicitors. Rosamund, dear, don't

get impatient, and don't get to love me less because I look shabby and cannot afford to dress like the fine Londoner who has just left us."

There was a strange glittering in Felix's eyes as he uttered the last words. It spoke of suppressed tears, and at sight of it my heart melted within me. I seized his dear hand and told him that I loved him more than ever, and that his shabby clothes would be to me henceforth beautiful as the robes of an angel, because they would speak to me of the great sacrifice he had made for my sake. And I told him nothing could spoil him, so noble were his looks; which was quite true. Whereupon Felix smiled, and back came the sweet music of the morning.

Before Felix left that night he alluded again to D'Arcy. "Don't think me prejudiced, dear," he said, "but don't be too friendly with Leigh, if you ever come across him again. I know a good deal about him. He is not a man I would bring

to my house if I had a sister. Most distinctly not a man for you to know."

I was in my gayest spirits just then, and answered him mockingly. "Be not alarmed, good youth," I said; "the eagle shall not come to the dove-cote, to flutter the Volscians in Corioli."

The eagle did not come to the dove-cote, but the dove continued to picnic with the eagle. D'Arcy came as frequently as ever. It seemed to me that his manner grew a little different about this time. It was bolder, and more friendly than was necessary; I did not like him quite so well.

One day when we were picnicking together I was forced to reprove him. He had done many little things which were not to my taste, finally seizing my hand and pressing it to his lips.

"I do not like your manner this afternoon, Mr. Leigh," I said haughtily. "You are like Gratiano, too wild, too rude, and bold of voice."

"But we are such old friends now," said D'Arcy, trying to laugh it off. "Why, ours was a friendship of a year's standing when we were formally introduced to each other by Master Ogre."

"Do not call him an ogre, please. The jay shall not mock at the lark when I am by."

D'Arcy looked offended. "You are mad about Felix," he said, "and really he is in no way so super-excellent. He sings well certainly, but so could others if they tried. I bet you if I took it up and worked at it, I should sing nearly as well as he."

"Oh, good gracious, spare us!" I cried. "If you grow musical we shall soon expect the frogs to come up from the marshes to study music."

"You'll drive me to desperation some day, Rosamund. I never saw such a girl! It is impossible to make any way with you. I have been your slave for more than a year, and yet you

seem to have no warmer feeling for me now than you had at the beginning."

"If there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance," quoted I, still much incensed.

"I think you are very ungrateful," said D'Arcy bitterly. "I have laid myself out to please you; no man could have done more; but you regard me simply as an amusement. Anyone else would do. All you care about is to while away the time. A clown out of a circus would suit you just as well, I have no doubt."

"Possibly better, because a clown in a circus dresses in character and you don't. Get a costume, I am sure it would suit you."

"Mock away!" cried D'Arcy fiercely, "mock away! It's your forte. Don't mind trampling on the feelings of your fellow-creatures."

He had lost his temper, perceiving which I instantly regained mine. After all, I reflected,

D'Arcy had really been very kind to me, and perhaps I had been a little hard upon him. It had been necessary to snub him, but there was no need to carry the snubbing further. What should I say now to make it up? He had risen to his feet and was looking down upon me with angry eyes, at the same time chewing his moustache violently. He was not looking his handsomest, but I preferred his anger to his demonstrations of affection, and liked him better so than I had liked him for some time.

"Don't let us quarrel," I said, looking up at him and smiling. "We have been friends a long time, as you say, and it would be a pity to quarrel. Only—friends must be careful how they behave, you see, even if they are of long standing."

It was lamely said, but D'Arcy understood me. He smoothed his angry brow and sat down again, and there was much meekness of manner

perceptible in him the rest of the afternoon. The lesson had been useful.

It was my birthday not long after. Felix took a holiday that day and spent it with me. For a gift he brought me a spray of mistletoe fashioned cleverly out of malachite and pearls. This gift was greatly admired by us all, and Matthew declared it to be the most chaste piece of workmanship he had ever beheld. I showed it with pride to D'Arcy afterwards, but he did not admire it so much as the others and seemed vexed he had not known it was my birthday. Next time he came he put a little brown morocco case into my hands just as we were parting, and begged me to accept the ornament it contained as a token of friendship from him. I would have opened it then and there, but he begged me not to do so until I reached home, only if I were pleased with it he hoped I would wear it in future when he came to see me.

As soon as I was in my room I opened the case eagerly. Flashing on a bed of violet velvet was a magnificent brooch of diamonds. I was ignorant of the value of diamonds, but I could see it was a thing of exceptional beauty. Never before or since have I seen a brooch to equal it. My delight knew no bounds. I pinned it in my hair, at my throat, on my bosom: lovely, lovely, everywhere! It might have been a star stolen from the brow of a fairy. The dinner bell rang whilst I was thus admiring it. Impossible to put it aside! Finally I pinned the beautiful thing beneath some folds of lace, rather low on my bosom. There I could see it, looking downwards, by moving the lace a little, and it would yet be veiled from the general public. Thus adorned I ran down to dinner.

My uncle did not notice details of personal adornment, and Matthew never presumed to comment on them unless invited to do so, therefore I did not

fear embarrassing questions should the brooch reveal itself. I observed as dinner progressed that it did reveal itself and had attracted Matthew's attention. Perhaps it was flashing too brilliantly in its hiding-place, or maybe I was incautious, and moved aside the lace too often to take little peeps. At all events it not only attracted but impressed him. Continually I caught his eye turned upon it, and every now and then he looked at me in a strangely scrutinizing, almost suspicious way. His manner made me uneasy, and I determined not to wear the thing in Matthew's presence again. He might tell Felix, then how should I explain my possession of such an ornament?

CHAPTER V.

AS soon as dinner was over I left the dining-room intending to go upstairs and take off the brooch, but Matthew was beforehand with me. He waylaid me in the hall barring the way upstairs in a strangely determined manner.

“Madam,” he said, pointing straight at the diamonds on my bosom, “you have there a very costly thing. That brooch is of great value, worth I should say a hundred pounds. It is also a new thing which has lately been given you by someone. It is not in Mr. Gray’s power to give you such a present. I think therefore, Madam, that under the peculiar circumstances I

am justified in asking you to tell me who has been so very generous as to give you those diamonds."

I turned crimson and answered rudely, "It is no business of yours."

Matthew gave me a sharp look. "Madam," he said, "I don't ask from impertinent curiosity. I ask because I am, and have been for some time, miserably uneasy in my mind, and very doubtful about you. Won't you do Matthew a kindness and make his mind a little easier by telling him frankly how you came by this brooch?"

I had recovered my presence of mind by this time. "Oh, I have no real objection to telling you," I said. "As a matter of fact, it was sent by the volunteers in grateful recognition of master's kindness in allowing them to drill on his common."

Matthew asked no further questions. He set his lips in a stiff stern line and went back to his work.

I bore myself in a very high and mighty manner to him after this little encounter. Nevertheless great uneasiness dwelt in my mind. Like Rosalind I had a hidden woman's fear in my heart, but a swashing and a martial outside. What did Matthew mean by saying that he was, and had been for some time, miserably uneasy and anxious about me? Could rumours of my meetings with D'Arcy Leigh have reached his ears, or was it possible he himself could have observed anything. Would he impart his suspicions to Felix? It was possible: then there would be an end of everything. Felix would never think the same of his little love again. It would be enough to make him turn away and leave me. I began to realize that I had wandered into a maze. A maze which had been forbidden to me and in which I might be caught at any moment. Deceit was its name, and Punishment lay there in hiding, ready to spring out upon me

at any moment. To go back was impossible, the maze had closed in behind me. The steps I had taken could never be retraced; they belonged to the unalterable past. Was there any escape? If I cried to Matthew and confessed my guilt, would he come and in silence deliver me?

No, that was a delusive opening! A year ago, when I gave Matthew the promise he had said: "If you break it Matthew will not forgive, and Mr. Felix shall at once be told all." There was but one course to take. I must come to a standstill, say good-bye to D'Arcy, give him back his diamonds, and trust to Dame Fortune not to discover me. Matthew's suspicions might so far be only vague suspicions; his manner over the diamond affair rather pointed to that conclusion. He would hardly be likely to carry tales to Felix unless he were very certain.

After much thought I decided upon this course

of action. D'Arcy would be due to-morrow, Tuesday, one of his regular days. It should be his last visit. I would meet him, setting out a little earlier than the usual hour of three, so as to get a start in case Matthew were of intent to watch and follow. The diamonds should be returned, a determined farewell should take place, and then on my return to the house Matthew should be told that the diamonds had been given in a private manner by a friend of Exbourne days, that I had returned them, not wishing to have anything further to do with the donor, and that I begged nothing further might be said about the matter. After that, surely Matthew would preserve a golden silence. He was fond of me and would not lightly get me into trouble. I knew I could lay that flattering unction to my soul.

Next day, at half past two of the clock, whilst Matthew was busy in his pantry over glass and

china, I sallied forth to take leave of D'Arcy. The path I chose was circuitous; it took me away from the windmill at first, then when out of sight of the house I turned to the right and circled back to the trysting-place. There stood D'Arcy eagerly awaiting me, a basket in his hand.

"I have come to say farewell," I said tragically, "you and I must never meet again."

D'Arcy looked as startled as if I had pointed a gun at his temples. Then pulling himself together he demanded my reasons. I gave them shortly, but they did not seem satisfactory to D'Arcy. He was not at all disposed to take his dismissal quietly, and grew so excited and indignant that I began to perceive it would be no easy matter to bid him farewell.

"I can't stand here talking any longer," I said nervously, "it is too near the house. Matthew might come after me, now he has grown suspicious.

I must go back, and we *must* say 'good-bye.'"

"I will not submit to being thrown over in this hasty and cruel manner," exclaimed D'Arcy angrily. "If you go back to the house, I'll follow you."

I looked at him half affrightedly, wondering whether he meant the threat.

"Yes, I assure you I mean what I say. I am a dangerous man when I am angered. Don't drive me too far, or I may have something to say to Felix as well as Matthew."

My heart leaped with fear, for in D'Arcy's eyes was a look I had never seen before, a look which completely changed him. It was as though a tame cat that I had believed harmless had suddenly turned into a panther. "You surely would never be so mean," I cried helplessly. "Oh, if you behave like that, what shall I do?"

The panther suddenly changed back into the tame cat. "You silly little thing! Of course I

wouldn't be so mean as to do that. I only wanted to frighten you. All the same, I refuse to take my dismissal here. We must discuss it a little bit first. If it is to be our last meeting, let it be a pleasant one to remember afterwards. You owe me that much after making me your companion for over a year. Come! Let us cut straight away from the house in this direction; it will be quite safe. The ground slopes downwards just beyond that ridge, and we shall soon be hidden from any prying eyes. We will go to your favourite spot, the spot with the pretty glades, and see! here in this basket are all sorts of tempting things. One last picnic I will have, Rosamund, so do not say me nay."

I gave in, for he had greatly frightened me. Together we hurried away over the rising ground in front of us, and down into the hollow beyond. Before long we were in one of the lovely arcades, a green vista, carpeted with velvety turf and

bordered with young trees and beautiful undergrowth of meadow-sweet, wild campion, tall nodding grasses, and graceful ferns. The summer sunshine filtered down through the spreading branches of the trees, and the shadows of the leaves were thrown upon the turf of the glade with such vivid distinctness that they looked like leaves of black velvet thrown upon an emerald ground. We did not penetrate far, D'Arcy chose a spot almost immediately, and we seated ourselves side by side, a little way back amongst the undergrowth of ferns and grasses, with the branches of the trees for a cool shade overhead. Where we sat we could see neither up nor down the glade, only just the strip of emerald turf in front of us with its embroidery of black velvet leaves and the young trees bordering it on either side.

I sat like a sad slave whilst D'Arcy unpacked the basket. Peaches, grapes, biscuits, sweets of all kinds, and lastly a bottle of champagne and

a couple of glasses. Usually I enjoyed these little picnics; to-day I felt suddenly that they had become distasteful. I should like to have flung the dainties to right and left of me, and then to have run away and hidden myself in the glades. But I dared not: for though full of spirit when all goes well, I have ever been timid in times of danger. A strange uneasiness filled my mind. I had become aware I was in D'Arcy's power, and felt that if he chose to fight over this farewell I was meditating, I should probably get the worst of it. Also Matthew's conduct the last two days had disturbed me. His manner had undergone a complete change. He failed in no outer service, but the tender anxious solicitude so observable in him usually had gone. In its place was a marked unnatural coldness. D'Arcy saw I was unhappy, and strove by gay jesting to dispel my gloom, but I could at best only force a smile. A jest's prosperity lies in the ear

of him that hears it, never in the tongue of him that makes it. Seldom did Shakspeare speak more truly than in this saying.

“And how did you like the brooch?” asked D’Arcy, spreading a napkin over my knees and looking kindly at me.

Yes, he was and had been very kind; for that very reason it would be difficult to dismiss him now. “It is a most beautiful brooch,” I answered, nervously fetching it forth from my pocket, “but I cannot keep it; it would anger Felix so.”

“Nonsense, nonsense!” cried D’Arcy, pushing back the brooch with a determined gesture as I held it towards him. “It is absurd that you may not accept a present from a friend. I will not take back my gift. It is most ungracious of you, most unkind, to refuse it in this way. Here! give it to me for a moment. Let me put it on you and see how it looks.”

He took the brooch out of my hand and pinned it into my dress at the throat.

"It looks lovely! You should always wear diamonds. They suit you, they are like yourself, strange, brilliant, changeable, fascinating, inexplicable. One never knows when the next flash will come, or what colour it will assume. No, don't take it off; not this moment any way. As I took the trouble to get it for you, at least let me have the pleasure of seeing you wear it once. You must drink a glass of champagne; it will do you 'a power of good' as the old women say; settle your nerves which seem a little strained, and revive your spirits. And, afterwards, we'll discuss the matter seriously."

I took the glass of champagne he held out to me and drank it all, then ate a few biscuits. The wine certainly did me good. My spirits revived a little and I felt less uneasy.

“Now half a glass more,” said D’Arcy, leaning forward and refilling my glass.

“I can’t drink more, I am not used to much wine,” I exclaimed, in vain trying to stop him.

“It is good champagne, it will do you no harm,” said D’Arcy, refilling his own glass for the third time. “Now we must have a toast. That’s right, cheer up, what shall we drink to?—The Queen—the Army and Navy?”

“No, I don’t care a straw for the Queen or the Army and Navy,” I said, “we’ll drink—we’ll drink to”—here a happy thought struck me—“we’ll drink to the Bar.”

“All right—To the Bar,” shouted D’Arcy, waving his glass in the air.

“To the Bar!” I cried excitedly, much pleased that we should be thus in effect toasting Felix. “The Bar!”—and I waved my glass so energetically that the golden liquid jerked out and splashed D’Arcy. He only laughed in gay good humour.

“May it grow less and less lucrative,” he shouted. “May dinners prove indigestible and exams fatal, may briefs be conspicuous by their absence, and years roll by before——” he stopped suddenly.

I looked up, following the gaze of his eyes. Right in front of us, on the turf where before there had only been the embroidery of black velvet leaves—stood Matthew, and—Felix.

I sat staring at them like one paralyzed, the glass in my hand, and the napkin, half covered with fruit, on my knees. D’Arcy also sat and stared, like me, too taken aback to say a word. Nothing could have been more unfortunate, more dreadful than for Felix to find me thus, apparently so happy, almost rioting; and that he should come upon us just when D’Arcy was saying such heartless things. What would he, oh, what could he think! The situation was so appalling, I could not rally myself to grapple with it, or

utter a single word. I saw Felix's eyes taking in every detail of the situation down to the large champagne bottle on the ground, and finally I saw them settle on the brooch at my throat. His face changed when he saw that, and became an ashen-white. 'Twas as though some hope he had entertained before had suddenly died. Testimony to my faithlessness was scarcely needed, but that horrible flashing valuable present from D'Arcy gave it. It was like a living witness: its flashes killed hope, shattered all possibility of faith in me for ever.

"This is the end," his face seemed to say, but he did not speak. I knew what he would do, he would turn away and leave me. Leave me, and perhaps never come back again. Still half paralyzed with terror I kept my eyes upon him. Yes, he was turning away from me; he was going; in another moment he would be gone. I could not speak, but I flung down my glass

and stretched out my hands to Matthew in mute appeal to him to stop Felix, and I know there was agonized entreaty in my eyes. Strange! Though I knew it was Matthew who had told Felix and brought him here, yet I turned to him in my need. Matthew did not fail me. With a swift eagle-like gesture he swooped upon Felix and brought him forcibly to a standstill. D'Arcy rose and faced him.

"There is no occasion for this tragic behaviour," he said coolly, "Miss Gwynne came with me here to-day against her will, at my earnest solicitation, and has just been refusing to meet me again."

"Nevertheless," said Felix, in a cold stern voice strangely unlike his own, "you and she have been meeting in secret for over a year. Don't deny it."

"I have no intention of denying it," replied D'Arcy, smiling calmly, "but you need not get

into a white rage with the poor girl about it, and frighten her until she almost has a fit."

I saw Felix's face quiver at this. Oh, to think of it! There was my dearest friend, the person who loved me best, and whom I loved best in the world; my companion in childhood, my comforter in sorrow, the man who was devoting his whole life to me, and D'Arcy was telling him not to get into a white rage with me! I tried to speak, but could not, a great lump was rising in my throat and threatened to choke me.

"I have no wish to frighten her," said Felix. "She is my betrothed; you may or you may not have known it. As my betrothed she had no right to deceive me and meet another man continually, and in secret. She has nothing to fear from me; I am not a tyrant, I will not keep her bound to me by chains that gall, *I set her free*—Nevertheless I would save her from you. Your conduct is indefensible." Here his eyes flashed and for a moment his

stern coldness deserted him. "Let me tell you, Sir, that it is only regard for her presence that restrains me from giving you a thrashing where you stand."

"Two can play at that game," said D'Arcy, but I saw that for a moment he quailed. It was evident that Felix meant what he said, and D'Arcy was but a poor creature beside him. Only for a moment did he quail, then he gathered courage and went on speaking.

"I don't see that my conduct is indefensible," he said, with an attempt at coolness. "Everything is fair in love and war. I am as much in love with Rosamund as you are, and I have this to be said in my favour which you have not: I can give her a comfortable, nay, a luxurious home. You'll never be able to do it. It is very easy to say my conduct is indefensible; pray, what is yours? Deuced selfish in my opinion. You get hold of a young inexperienced girl, almost a child,

and persuade her into thinking she loves you. Then you shut her up with a madman and his keeper, and keep her from all opportunities of comparing you with other men or of finding out for herself whether there is anyone who would make her happier. And then you work upon her feelings until she promises to wait for you while you scale Olympus or something equally impossible. A fine prospect for a young, beautiful, fascinating girl! To wait for you until her youth has gone, and to share a hand-to-mouth existence with you afterwards! And meanwhile it's to be considered a crime if she meets or talks to any young man but you. It's a shame! The girl's life is simply being spoilt."

I saw D'Arcy's words stung Felix to the quick. The colour rushed violently back into his face. "It seems to me," he said bitterly, "that I only stand in Rosamund's way. Let me go, Matthew. She can have the luxurious home and the diamonds;

she has shown this man is more to her than I am."

But Matthew would not let him go. Oh, good Matthew! kind Matthew! He had exposed me, but he was my true friend. Again he caught hold of Felix and would not let him go.

"No, Sir, you cannot go," he said, looking anxiously from me to Felix and from Felix to me. "You cannot leave that poor young thing like this. She loves you best; oh, I know it! Matthew knows it, surely in your own heart, Sir, you know it too. She meant no harm; it was only just her wild thoughtless way. This man got hold of her and led her a little astray. He's clever, and deep, and cunning with his tongue, you've just seen it for yourself. Consider her youth, her ignorance, her simplicity; how easy to get influence over her! Consider her position; fatherless, motherless, friendless. Can you leave her to become the prey of a man like that—a man who has shown himself without

honour, truth, or mercy? Why, Sir, she'd break her heart if you left her! I know it, Matthew knows it, you know it too. Remember, when I revealed it all, you promised to be very gentle. She has done great wrong, but we must be gentle with the erring ones. We must forgive, as we hope to be forgiven."

Felix looked at me. There was no longer any anger in his face, the old stern look had gone, but, oh, the mournful sorrow of the eyes that now for the first time met mine. Speech came back to me when I met the gaze of those eyes.

"Here!" I cried passionately, turning to D'Arcy and tearing the brooch out of my dress. "Take your diamonds! They come between Felix and me. Go! Go! I would rather share a hovel with him than live with you in a palace! Oh, a million, million times rather!" Then I flung the brooch at his feet amidst the grasses and champions.

D'Arcy stooped and picked it up. "Gratitude is

not your strong point, Rosamund," he said, trying to speak coolly, but looking very white and angry. "I'll go, of course, since you tell me so, but I think you will find that you miss me. Good-bye." Then he lifted his hat, and, without a word or glance more, walked away down the glade.

I burst out sobbing when he had gone, and held out my hands to Felix.

"Oh, Felix!" I cried, "forgive me, take me to your heart again. It is you I love, he was but my companion when you could not come. I was so lonely, so weary of the life at the castle, I was glad of any companionship. But I cared not for him, any other would have done just as well. It is you alone reign in my heart. Won't you forgive me and let things be as they used to be? Oh, Felix! Say—speak—won't you?"

"Things cannot be quite the same again," answered Felix in a husky voice, "for confidence

in you has been shattered. I may love as much as ever, but never again can I trust."

"Why, oh, why did you tell?" I sobbed, turning to Matthew. "You have separated Felix and me?"

"Madam," said Matthew gravely, "if I had not told, would there have been no deceit? Yes, and more deceit, until in time it would have blasted your character and your life. There was but one possible course open to me. To stop it. There was only one way to stop it: to tell, to prove, to punish, to make impossible in the future. The worst is over. You are going to be forgiven. Mr. Felix is going to forgive you. I know it, Matthew knows it."—Here he again looked anxiously from me to Felix and from Felix to me.—"He must forgive you, poor young lonely thing. He is all you have in the world. He stands to you in the place of father, mother, and protector, as well as lover and friend. And the confidence in you which has been shattered you

must build up again. That must be your work, your ambition, the object of your life. Mr. Felix! Look at her! Sobbing her poor young heart out there! She must be forgiven. She is our sacred charge. We are responsible for her to God."

I could see nothing for my tears, but through the blinding mist I felt a hand suddenly clasp mine. Felix's hand: the same kind hand that had clasped mine years ago when I was a hungry child weeping for loneliness on the sea-shore. And the next moment I was taken to Felix's heart again and knew I was forgiven.

It was long before I could look up from those loved arms, but when I did so, far away, at the end of the fairy glade, could be seen a dark figure walking away from us, and growing smaller and smaller. It was Matthew, my good angel, who had left us together. And the glory of the afternoon sunshine was about him.

BOOK IV.

A SEA OF TROUBLES.

Book IV.

CHAPTER I.

FELIX had spoken truly when he said: "Things cannot be quite the same again." I was forgiven, I was loved as much as ever, but I was no longer trusted. Confidence in me had been shattered. I saw it many a time though Felix tried to hide it from me. Voice and eyes betrayed him. Sometimes when he came down he would ask me what I had been doing in his absence, and give me a wistful anxious look when I told him, as though he doubted truth to be a liar or feared I lied like truth. And there was between us the barrier of a subject which neither cared to mention: the subject of the clandestine meet-

ings. D'Arcy came no more; his existence was never even alluded to, nevertheless he still affected our lives. Cast a stone into the water, and in a moment it is lost to sight and the sound of the splash is over. But the ripples spread and spread, ending we scarce know where. My deceit had been cast away from me, no one spoke to me of it more, and now it was my work, my ambition, to build up Felix's confidence in me again. But the wrongdoing had left ripples which widened as if they would never die. The calmness of confidence was Felix's no longer. My wrongdoing had agitated the waters of his love. The ripples showed in unwonted silences, in half checked sighs, in unfinished sentences, in uncommunicated but evident doubts. In my perception of the ripples lay my punishment. As time went on they grew fainter and further apart, but, to the last, they were there.

Nothing eventful happened the following year.

Another summer came, and went, making the third I had spent at the castle and leaving me nineteen years of age. Three years, Felix had said should be the limit of our waiting. Only one year more now, then the dreary time of waiting would be over. He was getting on well. Not only had he several pupils, but he contributed regularly to one or two good magazines; and articles of his which had appeared in the newspapers had been spoken of as brilliant. Also he had published a very beautiful story which had been highly reviewed and had already reached a third edition. This book was christened by me "The Bird of Dawning," a quotation from a favourite passage in Shakspeare. The words convey little at first sight, but they are given a beautiful meaning which bursts like a glory upon the reader as he progresses with the story. I have no time to dwell here upon the great charm of the book, but this much I can

say: it became a cherub to me on many a dreary day in the after years. Though I was down on dark earth, through its rapt eyes I saw Heaven's gate, and when it was night with me it showed me the morning.

The ripples were very faint that summer. The approaching fulfilment of our hopes made us feel happy, and I had been so good, so very good, really I did think sometimes Felix was beginning to have confidence in me again. Many a time I had felt miserably dull and lonely during the past year. D'Arcy had been right when he said I should miss him. I did miss him. But never once did I complain to Felix of how I suffered from the want of youthful companionship. I knew it would distress him after what had passed, so when he came I tried to appear contented. And Felix was sweeter and kinder than ever, and came to see me whenever he could get away, and there was nothing on earth he

would not have done for me, or got for me, had he been able.

The time went on, and Autumn came to us with bright footfall, and made for herself shining robes of crimson and gold. Life at the castle had for so long gone monotonously on I had ceased to look for change within its walls. Methought it would be just my uncle and Matthew and I, morning prowls, solitary afternoon rambles, and lonely evenings, until the end of the chapter. But Lachesis determined otherwise. She came in her garment of stars and changed suddenly the order of things. Sent away one poor mortal, brought back another, and opened again before me the broad path which I had thought closed for ever. Not even Lachesis could have forced me to walk therein, she could but place the way beneath my feet, but, alas! weak human nature seldom resists her.

First she picked the thread of my uncle's life

from the mingled yarn, placed it on her spindle, and twisted it into great dark knots.

It was in November I first noticed the change. It seemed to me that my uncle had suddenly grown more irritable and less benevolent. He tore a blanket into atoms one day simply because the cat had disported herself on his common that morning. I saw him do it myself: he brought it down from his bedroom into the hall and he gnashed his teeth together as he rent it asunder, and said he wished it were the cat. I watched him affrightedly from behind the library door, and thought to myself he could never again twit me with destroying sheets. Matthew came upon the scene just as the work of destruction was completed, and his behaviour astonished me. He went up to my uncle, took his arm, looked him fixedly in the eyes and said slowly, and with great emphasis:

“Control yourself, Sir, and come upstairs at

once with me. You surely don't want Grayson here again to take you to Shropshire?"

Matthew, who was generally so politely gentle and unpresuming!

My uncle looked quite frightened for a moment, then, all covered with blanket-fluff he walked upstairs with him like a lamb. He was smiling blandly when next he appeared in quite recovered good humour.

But scenes of this kind occurred again and again, until my original terror of my uncle, which time and his apparent harmlessness had deadened, began to revive. There were times when he seemed to have absolutely no control over himself, and often he flew into rages without any provocation whatsoever. Also he took to roaming about the house at night. Constantly at midnight or in the early hours of the morning I could hear him walking stealthily about the corridors and muttering to himself. I kept my

door locked, but even so I should have been terribly frightened had it not been for the certainty that Matthew would be mounting guard and watching over my safety. That faithful servant never slumbered at his post. Following the stealthy footstep could be always heard Matthew's quiet tread. Up and down the stairs, along the corridors, round and round the hall, in and out of the empty rooms it could be heard, following, following, until I used to marvel at the watchful persistent patience of the man. Sometimes I could hear him remonstrating with his master, trying with alternate threats and coaxings to induce him to return to his chamber, but remonstrances now seemed to excite my uncle. His mutterings would swell into loud angry speech, and then Matthew would desist, and in silence again follow his master.

Poor man! he grew thinner than ever from the effects of these nightly perambulations. Like

Cardinal Wolsey, he was weary and old with service. It was a burden, a burden too heavy for a man. One day he broke down. I went into the pantry suddenly and there I found Matthew sitting on a chair behind the door and sobbing! Sobbing! It was almost inconceivable. Matthew had always seemed to me so much tougher than ordinary mortals, he had gone on for so long like a machine, like a piece of iron, that to see him break down and betray human weakness was startling. Until this moment I had not ventured to allude to my uncle's increasing peculiarities. Something indefinable in Matthew's manner had warned me he would admit of no conversation on the subject, but now, seeing him so broken down, an angry impatience with my uncle and his queer ways overpowered every other feeling. Impulsively I gave utterance to the thought that had been in my mind for days.

“Oughtn’t he to be tied up, or something?”
I said.

Matthew looked up at me as might a helpless wounded eagle who sees the hand of the spoiler outstretched to rob it of its young.

“Tied up!” he cried wildly, “tied up! Oh, God! yes, that is what is coming, I suppose; I can’t hold out much longer. But not until I quite fail, not until life itself is endangered. No, not yet. I am praying to God day and night to restore some measure of reason to the dear master, enough to make it possible for him to continue enjoying his harmless innocent life here. Oh, my poor master! My poor dear master! ‘Tied up!’ Madam, have you no heart that you can stand there and in cold blood suggest the thing? Have you no love, no pity, for the helpless afflicted one? Oh!—if you could look back across the long years and remember him as I remember him, a beautiful bright affectionate lad,

you would feel that you would lay down your life to ward off from him any additional horror. You don't know how I feel for him. As a mother loves her babe, so do I love my poor afflicted master. O God! give him back his reason, just a little, I don't ask much, only just a little; enough to enable me to keep him here in freedom until he dies; enough to enable him to enjoy his poor simple harmless life in his own home."

I stole away, awed, for Matthew, in that mood, was above me and beyond me. But the murmur of his sobs and his praying followed me across the hall into the library, and even when I had shut the door, dwelt in my ears like sounds in a painful dream.

Matthew's prayer remained unanswered. God did not see fit to restore to my uncle his reason, no, not even the small measure that had been asked for. Day by day he grew more uncontrollable, night by night more restless. I felt it

was all tending towards some horrible climax, but the climax, whatever form it might take, seemed painfully slow in coming. Felix's visits were the only break in that strangely dreary time. He, too, seemed depressed by the state of affairs at the castle. I could see he was longing to take me away, and his longing to take me was not stronger than mine to go. I was utterly weary of the life I was leading. My uncle was like a horrible black shadow over everything, a shadow that might any moment develop into some fresh, dreadful shape. He began to affect my nerves so that I could not sleep at night, but lay awake through the long hours trembling and starting at every sound. One day I could not resist saying to Felix :

“Will the dear little home we are to share together be ready soon?”

“Dearest,” answered Felix, “it goes to my heart to see your pale little wistful face. I

really think if things do not mend here soon you must come to me in my lodgings. We will not wait until we can take a house. I must talk to Matthew about it."

But Matthew said he did not think it would be right to take a delicately fashioned young thing like me to poor lodgings in London. He said I had an assured home, and every comfort, and even luxury, where I was, under my uncle's roof: things might mend, and in any case he should take good care no danger came near me. He thought Felix would harm both himself and me if he married before he had a comfortable home to offer me, or had at least started in his profession. I suppose Felix agreed with him, for, to my deep disappointment, nothing more was said about an immediate marriage.

December arrived, and then a curious phenomenon was observed. All the water taps took to flowing. There were a good many in the

house. In the kitchens, in Matthew's pantry, in the bath-room, and in a little room close to my bedroom where the housemaid kept her pails and brushes, there were both hot and cold water taps. A dozen times a day these were found running. No one was ever seen turning them on, and often the surroundings were flooded, and serious damage was done, before the mischief was discovered. Matthew seemed greatly disturbed by this phenomenon. Indeed, so deeply did it agitate him, I felt convinced at last my uncle was the unknown cause, and began to wonder whether this fresh symptom on his part portended anything very terrible. It was observable that a tap or two were always found running if any business or duty called Matthew away from his master for a few minutes. Also intense excitement pervaded my uncle's manner when the running tap was discovered, and he would glare almost murderously at the person employed in mopping up the flood.

One day he attacked the cook with a kitchen skewer, and hurt her considerably in the arm. The poor woman had been consulting Matthew on some housekeeping point in his pantry. When she returned to the kitchen she found the boiler tap running, her floor flooded with hot water, and a sirloin of beef she had left on the table reposing immediately beneath the tap. She turned off the tap, and was stooping to rescue the beef when my uncle leaped upon her with a yell, from behind the back kitchen door, brandishing a skewer above his head.

“Go away,” he shouted. “I want a flood. You are all traitors seeking to rob me of my liberty, and I mean to engulf you all. Every inhabitant of this house has got to be engulfed, and the cook shall be engulfed first.”

The cook did not particularly want to be engulfed in her own kitchen, and a scuffle ensued, but she being without a weapon got the worst of it,

and was wounded as aforesaid in the arm. She shrieked for the police which brought Matthew upon the scene, whereupon my uncle instantly decamped. The cook then gave warning, and went off into violent hysterics. I, the mistress of the establishment, peered in at it all from outside the kitchen window, shivering with fear, and wondering what would happen next. A great deal happened. First the cook packed up and took herself off, then the housemaid followed suit. Matthew lost all spirit and went about like a broken-hearted man, turning off the water-taps mechanically when he found them running, and mounting careful guard over me, but addressing no further word of remonstrance to his master. A charwoman, a strong powerful creature, arrived in the afternoon to do the mopping-up. She evidently annoyed my uncle exceedingly, but perhaps her size dismayed him, for he did not attempt to attack her, as he had attacked

the cook. He simply took a seat and glared at her whilst she mopped, and when the mopping was over laughed diabolically at her big retreating figure, and gave her some fresh mopping to do in another quarter.

In the evening two gentlemen arrived and were closeted for some time with Matthew. Then they interviewed my uncle in the dining-room. From what I could gather, I imagine it was a stormy interview. Perhaps my uncle thought them guilty of presumption, and tried to grind them into a pulp with the dining-room poker. But everything was full of mystery just then; mystery and wretchedness. I heard them say something about a magistrate's certificate as they went out, and Matthew burst out sobbing when they had gone.

Two days later a burly man in black clothes arrived upon the scene. I found him sitting in the servants' hall, much to my surprise. I don't

think my uncle knew of his presence in the house, for nothing had been said about it, and this was a room he seldom entered. I guessed something unusual was about to happen, but dared not question Matthew, so utterly broken down did he look that day. He summoned me to dinner at half past six o'clock, apologizing for a plain one, as the charwoman had had to cook it. But lo, and behold! when we arrived at the dining-room door it resisted all our efforts to open it. We knew it was my uncle who had barred us out, for we could hear him within muttering to himself, and apparently chopping away at something. Matthew tried with different keys to open the door, but all his efforts resulted in failure. At last he summoned the burly man.

"Come, Grayson," he said, "the master has got beyond me now. He is dangerous when he takes to the knives."

Poor Matthew! I could see by his face that

it was torture to him to have to make this admission. He could not have looked more miserable had he been signing his master's death-warrant. The charwoman was next summoned, and together they burst open the door.

"Keep back, dear Madam," said Matthew, looking nervously back at me where I stood behind them.

"Yes, keep back, Missy," said Grayson, looking at me kindly.

But I was strung up to such a pitch of excitement I could not keep back. In spite of their remonstrances I followed Matthew and the charwoman into the room. Grayson kept a little in the background.

My uncle had wrenched a piece of wood off the carving of the sideboard and put it like a beer-tap into the keyhole, which was the reason we had not been able to open the door. He was standing at the head of the table, with the

carving knife and fork in his hands, and all the food on the table was chopped into pieces. He was just finishing off a fillet of veal when we came in, and looked flushed and angry at the interruption.

“Go away,” he shouted, brandishing the knife in the air. “Go away. Don’t you see I am engaged. I will brook no interference. Everything in this house shall be chopped up down to the Valkyrie there, if I am interfered with in any way.”

“Put down that knife,” called out Grayson in a determined tone, coming suddenly to the front and fixing my uncle with his eye.

For a moment my uncle trembled and paled, as if the sudden appearance of the stranger had been a shock to him. Then he recovered himself, and for answer hurled the fork in his left hand at the intruder’s head, missing it by about an inch.

“Dare to come a step nearer,” he shouted wildly, “and with this knife I will send you to Niflheim. I know you; I knew you were coming,

warnings of it have sounded in my ears many a night and day, but you shall never again take me to Shropshire. ”

These last words he uttered in a low hissing voice, and, when he had finished speaking, he leant fiercely forward over the table and brandished his knife threateningly at Grayson who stood facing him at the bottom. Grayson looked back calmly, and made for a moment as if he were going to sit down in my chair; the next instant he had flung my dinner-napkin deftly over my uncle's head and was upon him. I never saw anything so swiftly done. One second he was at the foot of the table, the next he was at the head, the carving knife was on the floor, and my uncle's arms were pinioned behind him in a grasp from which there was no escaping.

“Secure the knives,” shouted Grayson, and then a scene ensued which defies description. My uncle seemed transformed into a wild beast.

He raged, he stamped, he screamed, he swore, he grew purple, and actually foamed at the mouth. Effort after effort did he make to shake off the grasp that was pinioning him, but only succeeded in shaking Grayson to and fro and dragging him about. Meanwhile, Matthew, with a face like death, skipped about behind his master, trying to save his head from contact with the furniture, and the charwoman stumped round the table and calmly collected the knives. Horror-stricken I watched it all from the doorway. This was the climax for which I had so long been waiting. A deadly sick feeling came over me as I saw the two men swaying to and fro. Suddenly the room grew dark, the swaying figures became huge and faded before my eyes, a loud singing rushed into my ears, and the floor seemed to surge upwards and strike my head.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN I came to myself again I was lying on a sofa and everything was calm and quiet. A lighted lamp was sending a comfortable glow through the room, a bright fire was crackling in the grate, and Felix was bending over me. For a moment I could remember nothing of what had happened.

“How nice! Is this the dear little home?” I asked, too dazed to know where I was lying.

Felix looked down at me and seemed as if he could not speak. I tried to rise but fell back again in a moment.

“Why do I feel so tired?” I asked next,

drawing my hand across my forehead. Then I perceived my face was wet. "Oh, Felix! What has been happening? Why is my face wet?"

"Dearest one, you fainted," answered Felix, speaking huskily.

Then I remembered everything, and saw I was lying on the library sofa.

"Oh, Felix!" I cried, sobbing feebly, "I can't bear it any longer. He is so mad now, so very, very mad. I cannot stay here another night. Let me go, let me leave this horrible place for ever."

I struggled to my feet, then, overcome with weakness, tottered, and almost fell into Felix's arms. He gathered me up, as my mother had been wont to do in the far-away days of my childhood, and then sat down again holding me close against his breast.

"Hush, dearest one! Don't weep so, you will exhaust yourself. It is all over. They are going

to take him away to-morrow, and you are safe, quite safe, with your Felix."

I checked my sobs. "Where are they going to take him?" I asked.

"To an asylum."

The words gave me quite a shock. "Matthew will never allow it," I said.

"Matthew feels now it must be done."

"Where is he now?" I asked shudderingly.

"Upstairs in his room, quite quiet. They gave him some drug used in lunatic asylums, and it quieted him at once. Dear child, you look so exhausted, won't you go to bed?"

"No, no, I don't trust his quiet. I could not sleep up there alone. I must stay here with you. Oh, Felix! Do not leave me to-night, stay until he has gone, or I shall be engulfed, I shall be chopped up, I know I shall. Let me sleep here on this sofa to-night, and you sit by my side holding my hand."

So it was arranged. Felix had been telegraphed for by Matthew that afternoon, and had come down intending to return to town the same evening. He saw now I was far too unnerved to be left alone. Very tenderly he arranged me for the night on the sofa, with warm coverlets over me, and soft cushions beneath my head, and then he made me drink some hot strong soup and a glass of port. Matthew brought the tray in, but he did not speak to either of us, and his head was hung so low I could not see his face. He stole in and stole out again and neither of us could say a word to him. It was as though a death were in the house. And he, the chief mourner, was plunged into grief too deep for words.

The charwoman stumped in about ten o'clock and plumped down in an arm-chair by the fire. She said she had been sent by Matthew. We concluded she had been sent as a chaperon, but

she did not seem to understand her duties, for she fell asleep immediately.

And thus we passed the night. I, on my sofa, half sleeping, half drowsing, and Felix on a chair by my side. Whenever I opened my eyes, Felix was holding my hand, and the fire was lazily dropping coals, and the charwoman was heavily sleeping with her big feet straight out in front of her. Overhead was the madman, but I feared him no longer. Felix's presence, and the consciousness of his ever watchful love calmed my spirit into perfect rest. On the wings of love there had come into the dusky room a cherub. On the wings of music the same cherub must have come to Beethoven years ago. For the sweet drowsy hours of that never-to-be-forgotten night and the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata bore to my heart one and the same strain.

Early next morning, soon after the charwoman

had left us to see to breakfast, Matthew came into the room.

“I have come to say good-bye,” he said. “The master leaves in about half an hour, and where he goes, I go. It will be well for Madam to remain in this room until we have gone.”

Felix stood up, and instinctively I also rose to my feet. For in Matthew’s face and bearing there was such terribly unnatural composure we were overawed by it, and could no more have sat whilst he addressed us than if he had been a king.

“I do not know how long we shall be away,” proceeded Matthew, clasping his hands tightly together in front of him, and avoiding our eyes. “It may be a few weeks, it may be months, it may be years. God’s ways are inscrutable: we know not how He will deal with the poor master. But this house will for the present remain your home, Madam. It will not be long now

before Mr. Felix is able to give you another. I do not think it is advisable you should be married immediately. We will wait a little and see how things turn out. If—the master—if our absence prolongs itself into many months, then perhaps it will be well for you to go to Mr. Felix sooner than was intended, and it must be arranged that some money allowance be made you, as the master's niece, to help the housekeeping at starting. Mr. Felix is proud, very proud, but he will see that the niece of a rich man cannot be allowed to suffer the pinch of poverty. However, all this can be settled later. I shall leave my address with both of you, and in any difficulty please communicate at once with me. A telegram to Mr. Felix, Madam, will bring him to your side in a few hours, if anything goes wrong. I have had no time to engage fresh servants, but the charwoman is a faithful, honest, capable creature whom I have known for years,

and she has promised to remain here as long as her services are needed. From time to time I shall remit money for all expenses. I regret that I can provide you with no suitable companion, but in order that you may not feel unprotected, or quite lonely, Anne Gillotson, the dress-maker, is coming to live here during our absence, and will render you any personal services you may desire. It would please me if you would let her accompany you if ever you go very far from the house. Also, when Mr. Felix comes down, I think it will be well that she should sit with her sewing in a corner of the room you are both occupying. I think this will be advisable. We must consider Madam's youth, and the peculiar position ; don't you think so, Mr. Felix ?"—Here for the first time he looked at Felix.

"Quite so," answered Felix gravely.

"And, Madam,"—here for the first time Matthew looked at me—"a few last words. This

young man has given you his life. The whole of his heart is yours, and the love of a good man is a very precious thing. Let no temptation again induce you to do anything unworthy of it. There is no sin so base and cruel as that of treachery towards faithful love. If you are guilty of it—remember these are Matthew's last words to you--upon you will be laid the punishing hand of God. And now, poor dear young things——”

He stopped, and made for a moment as if he would have said “Good-bye,” but the word stuck in his throat. A queer little sound, half choke, half sob, escaped him, then he turned and rushed from the room.

How Matthew took his master away I know not, for Felix kept me shut up in the library, but there was no sound of any scuffle. We heard the sound of carriage-wheels driving away from the stables half an hour after Matthew had left us, and then we knew that they had gone, and that for

weeks, or perhaps months, or it might be years, we should see Matthew and his master no more.

Felix and I sat down to breakfast in the dining-room. I sobbed as I ate mine, for the house felt wretched and empty, and the charwoman had forgotten to raise the blinds, and Felix spoke in a low voice, and it was like the day of a funeral.

Now began a strange new life in the castle. The place was the same, yet not the same. The charwoman stumped about in the haunts of deft agile Matthew, and the dressmaker sat at table with me in the place of my uncle. She was very conscientious; sometimes when Felix came down I wished she were less so, her perpetual presence in the corner was so annoying. She was also a tolerably educated woman, but had not a gleam of originality or humour. Her commonplace remarks wearied me before she had been two days in the house. Music was to her a dead

letter. She could not even see beauty in the Moonlight Sonata! Said there was a sameness about the beginning, and in her opinion a great deal too much clatter about the end! Also she thought people made too much fuss about Shakspeare's plays. She could see nothing wonderful about them herself though she had looked through them once or twice. One of Mrs. Hemans's poems would beat the lot in her opinion. Did I know that beautiful one beginning :

“The boy stood on the burning deck.”!!

At the end of a fortnight I felt almost as if my uncle with his ingulfing and chopping would be preferable. I said so to Felix one day. He suggested that I should try and make myself independent of her society by writing a novel. It was a delightful idea! I set to work upon it with frenzied eagerness, and worked so hard that in three weeks I had completed the novel. It

was entitled "The Shaft of Bassanio," and the substance of it was as follows:

Bassanio lived near huge cliffs with huge chasms in them. He had a charming wife who was very musical and recited beautifully. One day whilst out walking together on the cliffs he asked her to recite, and, being greatly carried away by the beauty of the passage she was reciting, failed to see a chasm at his feet, and accidentally knocked his wife down it. Bassanio sought down this chasm for weeks, but was never able to find the body. In this sad plight he bethought him of Shakspeare's Bassanio who, when he lost one shaft, shot his fellow the selfsame way with more advised watch, to find the other forth. Thereupon he took unto himself a second wife. Her he escorted to the cliffs, and when he came to the chasm in which his first wife's body lay hidden, he pushed the second wife over the selfsame way, with much advised watch as

to where she fell. Thus he recovered both bodies.

The two wives were buried in one grave, which was daily strewn with roses, and on their joint tombstone Bassanio had engraven these words of mighty Shakspeare's:

"'Tis fond to wail inevitable strokes."

And Bassanio sought no more a woman in wedlock, but lived happily to a ripe old age, and was much respected by all his neighbours.

I read aloud this manuscript to Felix. To my surprise he laughed uncontrollably over it, until the tears rolled down his cheeks. At the time I was angry, and tossed the manuscript into the fire, but now I know he was justified in his mirth. Still, there are times when I regret I did not send the book forth to the world instead of destroying it. Felix, of course, had a true and

refined taste, and knew when a book had or had not literary merit. But, as is well known, it is not always so with critics. My story was foolish, nay, utterly ludicrous, nevertheless it might have been well reviewed.

Five weeks thus passed away. They brought two letters from Matthew, but in neither was any hint of a return. My novel-writing having come to an ignominious end, I was thrown once more upon Anne Gillotson for companionship, and found my days more wearisome than ever. The dull monotony, unbroken even by my uncle's vagaries, became insupportable. I got into so restless and impatient a state my temper began to suffer. Anne had to put up with a good deal at this time, and often I pained Felix by my cross behaviour. I had begun to feel impatient and dissatisfied even with him, though I tried not to show it. Two years and a half gone, and no sign of the dear little home yet!

It was absurd! I was quite tired of waiting. I thought also that he ought to manage to come and see me oftener. What if he had appointments to keep? Surely I was more important than appointments! In short I was in a dangerous frame of mind, ready to welcome any distraction, ready to fall a prey to any temptation. And this was the moment Lachesis chose to bring the tempter back, and place him once more in my path.

It came about early in the New Year. It was a wet wintry afternoon. I was moping in the library, Anne was busy over some work for me in the sitting-room the other side of the hall. The charwoman had just placed my tea on a little table by my side. As she left the room there came a loud ring at the front-door bell. It was an unwonted sound, for since my uncle had gone away, no one had rung that bell. Felix, our only visitor, came in without ringing,

tradespeople went to the back door. I started up, feeling quite excited, and listened intently. The door was opened, a man's voice could be heard in conversation with the charwoman, then a quick footstep crossed the hall, and D'Arcy Leigh stood before me. His eyes had a laugh in them as they met mine, and it seemed altogether natural and delightful to meet him once more. I forgot everything in the pleasant surprise of the moment. Forgot that by my friendship with this man I had once nearly lost Felix, forgot that by entertaining him now I should be guilty of the basest, most cruel sin of all, the sin of treachery to faithful love. Matthew's last words were as though they had never been spoken.

I looked up at D'Arcy, and a laugh came also into my eyes. My spirits rose effervescingly at the prospect of an amusing afternoon.

"Come in," I said. "The ladies have prevailed, the Volces are dislodg'd, and Marcius gone."

"So I heard," replied D'Arcy, the laugh on his face deepening almost into a grin, and revealing teeth which seemed to have grown larger and whiter during his eighteen-months' absence. "A little bird brought the news across the common to London. And who is with you in place of the lunatic and his keeper?"

"A charwoman waits upon me, and a dress-maker keeps me company," I replied.

"How charming! Your guardians really do provide for you most thoughtfully. I trust you find the dressmaker entertaining."

"I don't trouble her much. I am of Shakspeare's opinion, that two women placed together make cold weather."

"So they do. I never yet saw two women live together without some nagging and scratching, and the older the women, the worse they nag and scratch. It requires a little of the male element to keep them in order. These remarks,

of course are not personal; you are only a girl, and have not yet arrived at the nagging and scratching period. May I sit down and have some tea, or will Mr. Felix Gray come in and knock my head off?"

"Felix is not coming down to-day," I said, the shadow of a shameful recollection creeping over my high spirits.

D'Arcy instantly sat down. "May I ask if he has succeeded in making his fortune yet?" he inquired, half sarcastically.

"No," I answered gloomily.

"And he never will. That engagement of yours is the most hopelessly absurd thing I ever heard of."

"Never mind my engagement. Where have you been this long time?"

"Abroad; trying to forget you."

"You don't seem to have done it," I remarked, unable to repress a little smile as I looked up from my tea-cup.

"I find I can't," answered D'Arcy. The laugh died out of his eyes as he spoke, and an unusual earnestness crept into them. I thought it became his face well. "Rosamund," he went on pleadingly, "you will not send me away again?"

I looked back at him hesitatingly, afraid to compromise myself, yet reluctant to say I must forgo his acquaintance. Just then there was the sound of a quiet footstep in the hall. We both looked up. Anne Gillotson was standing in the doorway. Her sewing was in her hand, and she looked uneasily from me to D'Arcy and from D'Arcy to me. Then her eyes wandered to the corner she usually occupied when Felix came down. This was a little more than I could stand.

"It is all right," I called out impatiently, "this is a very old friend."

"You forget—a relation," put in D'Arcy, grasping the situation instantly.

"Oh, yes! of course. I forgot. This is a rela-

tion. So don't trouble about me, Anne. I will call you if I want you. Please shut the door after you."

Anne coloured up a little. This curt dismissal savoured no doubt of rudeness, and it was contrary to the spirit of Matthew's orders. But she did not like to force herself upon us, so she went out and shut the door. And this was the beginning of the end.

I want to pass quickly over the time that followed. It was a time of blackest treachery to Felix. My spirit burns within me for shame to think I could ever have been so base. Again I plunged into the deceit which Felix had once so generously forgiven. D'Arcy came no more to the house; I forbade it as dangerous. But we met. I tried to salve my conscience by saying to myself that the meetings were none of them brought about by me, but I took no decided steps to prevent them. Twice or thrice a week

we met, occasionally even oftener. Felix knew it not. Day after day he toiled on, centring all his hopes in me, giving me the whole love of his great heart. Not all the water in the rough rude sea can ever wash out the shame of such a thing. Even then I knew my conduct was black. Many a time did I feel frightened at myself and make attempts to draw back. But D'Arcy left no stone unturned to win me to himself, and seasoned his tainted pleas with such a gracious voice, it obscured the show of evil. He should have been a barrister by rights. He would have made his fortune pleading, and have persuaded many that black was white. Continually he strove to poison my mind against Felix. I see it clearly now. He could not shake my love, that was too deeply rooted: though false in action, I never grew false in heart, but he did make me feel very dissatisfied with the efforts of my lover to win for me a home. Fanned by

his dexterous tongue the flame of my impatience leaped so high that one day it betrayed itself to Felix.

“I am tired of being engaged,” I said crossly. “It goes on month after month, year after year, and here I am, as single as ever. Why don’t you undertake some enterprise of great pith and moment, instead of waiting to be called to a stupid old bar?”

CHAPTER III.

FELIX was standing in the honeysuckle porch, and it was nearly the hour of his departure. He looked down at me with a startled expression.

“I am wasting my best years,” I went on, recklessly, quoting D’Arcy. “I might just as well be a hideous old maid, or a nun. It is all very well for you: you are living in a gay city where the very streets are amusing, but I am cooped up like a prisoner, in the middle of this waste land. You ought to think of me a little.”

This was the unkindest cut of all. Felix’s face flushed, and by his voice, when he answered me, I knew he had been deeply wounded.

“For years, Rosamund, I have thought of no one else,” he said, “and you know it. The gay city has not been gay to me, neither have its streets been amusing. The only relief from work my life has known for nearly three years has been when I have come down here to this ‘waste land’ to see you.”

I hung my head, put to shame by the reproachful truth of these words, but in too contrary a mood to own it.

“I am sorry you are tired of your engagement: but perhaps you did not mean it—did you, Rosamund?”

I felt Felix’s eyes were searching for mine, but I only plucked at the dry twigs of the honeysuckle, and turned my back upon him. His hand then sought mine, but I drew mine away. I heard him sigh.

“Rosamund!” he exclaimed, still the same wounded ring in his voice. “You are not in a

kind mood to-day. But perhaps you have been too hardly tried. It has been a long weary time of waiting, though I have done my best to shorten it. I must not be vexed with you, poor young lonely thing. It is time for me to leave, or I shall miss my train. I must go, dear one, I must go. Rosamund! Won't you look at me?"

I put my hand out to him backwards without moving round.

"Are you not going to give me a kiss? not one, for Felix, who loves you!"

"No, I don't feel inclined," I said in a low voice, at the same time thinking he would be sure to take one.

But Felix did not insist on the point. He was ever a little proud. He took the hand I was still holding out backwards, pressed it gently, and left me. And so I let him go away from the castle the last time. Oh, Heaven! if I could but have known it—the last time.

I watched him walking away across the common until he had gone a long way, and then suddenly my heart stirred tenderly within me. It was the sight of his lonely figure that did it, his lonely figure going away from me sadly across the common. It was his only pleasure to come down and see me, his only relief from hard work. He had no real need to tell me the city was not gay to him, nor the streets amusing. In my heart I knew it. I was his only joy.

"Felix! Felix! Come back!" I cried suddenly. "Come back, and I will be so kind to you."

It was too late. Felix had gone beyond reach of a call.

And now I have to tell you how the end came. It was on a Thursday Felix came down that last time. On the Friday D'Arcy came and persuaded me to promise to go with him to London the next day. There is no need to write

down here all the arguments he used; suffice it to say he persuaded me. In order that you may fully understand the depth of my offence in consenting to go, I must explain one thing. Felix had once expressed a wish to have me up in London for a day. It would have been a keen delight to him to give me such a treat. But Matthew set his face against it. He could not leave his master to accompany us, he said, and under the circumstances, I being so young and unprotected, and moreover engaged to Felix, it would not do for me to be up there, in that great city, alone with him a whole day. He said it behoved Felix to be very careful of me since I had no mother. If I had had my dear mother to go with me it would have been very different, and I could have seen Felix's lodgings then and had tea there. But Felix would always live in London, and I should see plenty of it when I was married, so it was only postponing

a pleasure. Felix said Matthew was right, and never pressed the matter again. So because these two men were so very careful of me, I had never seen London. Now you will understand how very deliberate was my offence in stealing up there secretly with D'Arcy.

Early on Saturday morning I rose, and arrayed myself in my prettiest garment to do honour to the great city. It was a dress Felix loved, and which I generally wore on Sundays when he came down. In colour it was the deepest shade of a dark purple pansy, all trimmed with golden-brown fur. And the hat was also of pansy-colour, with a border of the same fur. Anne stared at me when I came down to breakfast in this smart array.

"An old schoolfellow of mine is staying near here," I remarked, as carelessly as I could, "and she has written to ask me to spend the day with her." You see I was ready with the lie.

D'Arcy had concocted it for me the day before.

"I am so glad, Miss," said Anne, with a kind smile, "I have been very sorry for you, left alone here with me, who am such a dull companion. You do look so nice: that pansy colour just suits you, and the fur is just dark enough to set off your golden hair. And I don't know when I have seen you with such a beautiful colour!"

Yes, I knew I had a colour. I felt it mounting higher and higher as Anne spoke, for pure shame at her simple admiration and belief in me.

"I must go now, Anne," I said, rising as soon as breakfast was concluded. "By the bye, you need not mention this visit of mine to anybody. I have reasons. The better part of valour is discretion, you know."

"But I don't like hiding anything, Miss," said Anne, rising and coming after me to the door with a disturbed face. "Do you think it is right?"

Her remonstrance fell unheeded on the air. I

was off, making the wind my post horse, for it was already the hour of appointment. Just outside the door I ran across the postman. He held out two letters to me, I hastily pocketed them and rushed forward. On the road which cut across the common from east to west was D'Arcy waiting for me in a cab. I jumped in, and soon after we were in a train speeding along to Waterloo. I was full of pleasurable excitement at the idea of a day in London. It was the city of my dreams, the city in which Felix dwelt, the city in which would be my future home. I had no fear of being discovered by Felix. Saturday was his busiest day, and D'Arcy assured me he had found out his haunts and his hours, and knew how to avoid him.

“How nice!” I exclaimed, looking round at the comfortably cushioned carriage. “Is this first class? Do you know I have only been in a train twice before in my life. Once when I went to

school and once when I left it. And both times it was third class. How soon shall we be in London?"

"In about five-and-twenty minutes," replied D'Arcy, looking at me admiringly, so admiringly that I felt quite uncomfortable for a moment. I bethought me of the two letters in my pocket which had arrived that morning, but which I had had no time to read. Feeling glad of the diversion I pulled them forth.

"I hope you don't mind a session of sweet silent thought," I observed to D'Arcy. "I have not yet had time to read my letters."

The first I read was from Matthew. "Uncle is much better," I said delightedly when I had finished reading it. "He is well enough now to come home. He has been mending some time, but Matthew says he was afraid to hope at first, so made no mention of it in his letters. But now his hopes are realized. Poor old Matthew!

I am so glad. They are coming back on Monday evening. It will be quite delightful! You have no idea how empty the castle has seemed without them. Matthew has written to tell Felix, and has invited him to dinner for Monday evening, so we shall be quite a happy family gathering. Is not it nice?"

D'Arcy did not look as if he thought it particularly nice, on the contrary, the information seemed to depress him. That being of little importance I went on to my second letter. It was from Felix, and its contents nearly took my breath away.

"Oh! Oh!! Oh!!!" I cried as I read, jumping up in my seat with delight.

"Wherefore this excitement?" asked D'Arcy, eyeing my letter suspiciously.

"Excitement! Would not you feel excited if you suddenly heard you were to be married to Felix immediately? That is what is going to

happen to me. Felix has been left three thousand pounds by an old friend of his father's. Three thousand pounds! And directly he heard it he went straight off to Hampstead and took a dear little house he has been longing to take for weeks. A house with gables and latticed windows, and heaps of ivy on the walls and a little garden at the back. And he is to be married to me immediately, immediately! Can you imagine greater happiness. Just, too, when I was beginning to feel quite weary of waiting. He is coming down on Monday to welcome uncle, and tell Matthew, and consult with me about the furnishing. The furnishing! Old china, flowers, tea-things, books, a piano! Oh, what a day of days! Everything that is delightful is happening."

"The day is not over yet," said D'Arcy in a low voice.

He was but as the cuckoo is in June, heard, not regarded. "Now where shall I go for my

honeymoon?" I went on musingly. "It must be somewhere in Wales, because there is no other country which could be to me so dear and beautiful. I have rather a fancy for Milford Haven. Shakspeare has especially alluded to it. You may remember Imogen says to Pisanio:

‘Tell me how Wales was made so happy as t’inherit such
a haven?’

Yes, I think it shall be Milford Haven. Or could you suggest a better place? Where would you like to go to if it were your honeymoon?"

I looked up at D’Arcy as I asked this question. Then I received a shock. He was deadly pale, and on his face was the look I had seen there once before, on that never-to-be-forgotten day when I had wished to say good-bye to him, and he had threatened to follow me to the house and betray me to Felix. The smiling gaiety which usually characterized him had gone, and in its

place was something I could not fathom ; rage, spite, fierce disappointment, violent determination, it might have been one of these things, or all. It was a sudden revelation of ugliness, both physical and moral. Ugliness which I had never suspected, but which must have been there all along, for twice now I had seen it, though the first time it had not been so pronounced. A great uneasiness began to stir within me. Could this be the real D'Arcy? Were those smiles and light jests but as a mask which is put on to hide the real features? Did I really know D'Arcy Leigh at all? The warnings of Matthew and Felix came suddenly back to me. "A strange young man—a young man of bad character, or he would never have come secretly at such an hour—his conduct stamps him:—Not a man I would bring to my house if I had sisters—most distinctly not a man for you to know—cunning, deep, and clever with his tongue: a man without honour,

truth, or mercy."—All this they had said, and many a thing besides, yet with this forbidden man who might be all they had said, I was now secretly going off to an unknown city. Like a flash of lightning these thoughts passed through my mind, and so strong was their effect upon me that I sprang to my feet and half involuntarily seized hold of the handle of the carriage door.

"I am frightened at what I am doing," I exclaimed, "I am repenting of it. Please let me go back. I don't feel as if I knew you, I don't like your white angry face. Let me go back."

Instantly D'Arcy's face smoothed itself back into the familiar lines, and he was smiling again. "Did I look white and angry?" he said, "I am so sorry. I don't feel well this morning somehow; not quite myself. But you surely did not imagine I was feeling angry with you? No, Rosamund, very far from that. My one thought to-day is

to give you pleasure. Sit down again, do sit down. Remember this will be my last day with you, for are you not going to be married to Felix immediately?"

"I would rather go back," I said, almost in tears. "I am afraid of going on. It is wrong, it is a thing Felix would never forgive."

"If it is wrong, why, *you have done it*, whether you go back or not. We are in London now, at the present minute. We have passed Vauxhall and are running into Waterloo, the terminus. Besides, you cannot go back until the evening, there is no train."

This was of course a lie, but I was so ignorant I did not suspect it. "Then I will wait in London by myself," I said, "or I will go and do some shopping. I will not go about with you."

"You cannot do such a thing. Strange men would come up to you and talk to you. They always do it if they see a pretty young girl

alone. And not knowing Felix's haunts you might run into his very arms, and how would you explain your presence in London then?"

This was a terrible thought. It seemed to me there was no help for it. I must go on with D'Arcy as I had begun. *I had done it*, whether I went back or not. He had spoken truly there.

"I will take great care of you, Rosamund; surely you do not doubt me," said D'Arcy softly. "You have met me so often, one meeting more or less cannot matter now. Do sit down: our last day!"

I sat down and resigned myself to the inevitable. But the bloom had gone from the pleasure of the day.

I was shown the gay city. First of all we drove in a hansom over Westminster Bridge, to the houses of Parliament and the Abbey. We went inside the Abbey. So beautiful was the place I longed to be left alone there for the

whole day, but dared not suggest it to D'Arcy. Then we drove along the Birdcage Walk to see the grand Palace of the Queen, and on from there to Hyde Park Corner. Here D'Arcy dismissed the hansom and we sauntered across the Park to the Marble Arch. Then we took another hansom and drove a little way along Oxford Street and down Bond Street, and to the left along Piccadilly until we came to the Circus. The second hansom was dismissed here, and D'Arcy suggested luncheon, but I preferred to stroll up Regent Street which he had said was the finest street in London. It was all so new, so exciting, that I forgot my fears in great measure. It would have been impossible to feel really depressed with that delightful letter in my pocket. Also the consciousness that I was going to be married immediately made the shops doubly interesting.

D'Arcy found it difficult to get me past the

bonnets and dresses. We walked all up the right side of the street, and when we got to the top I said,

“Now let us walk all the way down the other side.”

“Very well,” said D’Arcy, laughing in quite his old way, “but I bargain for one thing, that we stop on the way at Verrey’s and have luncheon. It is two o’clock. Weak man cannot hold out longer.”

We stopped at Verrey’s, and in a beautiful large room downstairs we had luncheon. The room was crowded with laughing chattering people who sat about at different tables. This was the gay world; this was life. Here people enjoyed themselves, and old and young were merry together. To me, it was like a glimpse of another world. There was a kind of enchantment about it. D’Arcy and I had a table to ourselves, and a most dainty luncheon was served to us, ever

so many courses and a bottle of champagne. D'Arcy was his most lively self; so brilliantly did he laugh and talk it was difficult to remember that revelation of ugliness in the train. Luncheon took a long time, for I was busy watching the people and had a string of questions to ask between every mouthful, but D'Arcy seemed in no hurry.

"Take some more champagne," he kept saying continually, and disregarding my remonstrances replenished my glass with wine almost each time I drank from it. It was both delicious and exhilarating. Beneath its influence I grew slightly excited and found myself emulating D'Arcy in liveliness. People looked our way a good deal, and I could see them whispering to each other as they stared. D'Arcy did not seem to mind, on the contrary he seemed rather to like the attention we were exciting.

"The captive maiden makes quite a sensation

when she shows her face in the gay city," he said laughingly. "And small wonder she does so. The roses of Wildacre Common beat those of Regent Street. Now one glass more and then we will go."

But I refused to touch more wine. "I have had enough," I said decidedly, "let us get out into the fresh air and see some more shops."

We went out and strolled down the street towards the Circus. One lovely window full of jewels attracted my especial attention, and I went into the shop to buy a present for Felix. After examining the jeweller's whole stock, which seemed to amuse both him and D'Arcy, I finally selected a small pearl pin. It was unostentatious looking, nevertheless I found it somewhat taxed my means to pay for it. But I knew it would please Felix vastly, so I did not mind. D'Arcy was then for buying me a ring, but I set my face so resolutely against it, at last with rather

a bad grace he gave in. When Piccadilly Circus was again reached, D'Arcy looked at his watch.

"Twenty past four," he said, half to himself, then lifted his walking cane to summon a passing hansom. This he helped me into, and then stood by the driver for a minute or two talking to him. Apparently D'Arcy was giving him detailed directions about something, but he spoke in so low a voice that all I could hear was the word "sovereign."

"I am going to show you Trafalgar Square," he said, when he had jumped in after me, "and then we will drive a little way along the Strand. It is a wonderful thoroughfare: to my mind there is no more interesting street in London. I feel I ought to show you the Strand."

I was quite ready to see the Strand, and when Trafalgar Square had been duly admired we proceeded thither.

We drove very slowly along the Strand, so slowly that I was rather surprised, for hitherto we had driven more rapidly. It seemed a very crowded thoroughfare, and was certainly very varied and interesting in character, but the shop windows were not quite so much to my taste as those in Regent Street. After a time we passed a church, and then we came to some very fine handsome buildings.

“What are those?” I asked, pointing to them.

“Oh, Courts of Justice, or something of the sort,” answered D’Arcy carelessly. “See! Is not this a fine statue? We are out of the Strand now, this is Fleet Street. The driver is going to turn here and take us back along the other side of the Strand. I know you like exploring both sides of a street.”

I was driven back along the Strand, but saw nothing very interesting on this side. A low archway, leading into a kind of flagged court

was the only thing that attracted my attention, but when I asked D'Arcy what the place was, he seemed pre-occupied and gave me no answer. At Charing Cross the driver again turned, and a second time drove us slowly in the direction of Fleet Street.

"What is he going the same way for again?" I exclaimed in surprise. "I think I am rather tired of the Strand; I should like to see something else."

"Oh, yes! we are going to St. Paul's now," answered D'Arcy hastily. "We must go this way to St. Paul's."

I was very anxious to see St. Paul's, so resigned myself to some more of the Strand. Our second progress along it was almost slower than our first, but I did not mind with St. Paul's in prospect. I think I was still slightly excited with the champagne I had had at luncheon, for I felt I was talking with unusual animation. D'Arcy

responded a little absently, and seemed intent on looking out for something ahead of him. Suddenly he raised his cane, lifted a little trap-door in the roof with it, and rattled his cane for a second inside the opening. The driver stopped at once. I laughed merrily, it seemed such a funny way of communicating with a driver.

“What are we stopping for?” I asked, looking at D’Arcy.

Then for the second time I received a shock. He was deadly pale, and on his face was a look of triumph almost malignant in its intensity. Involuntarily my eyes followed the direction of his, and then—oh! then,—I would have liked the houses to fall upon me and cover me. My heart stood still with terror. For coming towards me, not ten yards away, looking unusually smiling and happy, was Felix.

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